Robert E. Rockwood

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THE SHORT-STORY

ITS PRINCIPLES AND STRUCTURE


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To

JAMES WHITFORD BASHFORD

PREFACE

THE aim of this book is not to trace the origin or the development of the short-story, but to set forth some standards of appreciation of what is good in story-writing, illustrating by the practice of the masters as contrasted with amateurish failures: this with the view of rousing the student to a more lively interest in his reading, and of awakening such a wholesome spirit of self-criticism as shall enable him to improve his own workmanship, should he feel called to write.

It is expected that one who undertakes to study or to write short-stories will become acquainted at first hand with the masterpieces of this art. With this in view, a reading-list has been appended, roughly classified in parallel arrangement with the topics studied in the text. The list includes, besides a number of stories generally recognized as great, a fairly representative selection from recent magazines. It is the author's belief that not only the masterpiece but the story which is moderately good can be made a profitable study in construction for the beginner. But it has been the aim to

lay due stress, within the text, on those elements of greatness which distinguish the masterpiece from the average short-story.

The books which I have found most useful are referred to in the footnotes, and listed in the bibliographical note at the close. Special acknowledgment is due Professor William E. Smyser for helpful criticism. But my heaviest debt is to Mr. James Weber Linn and Mr. Nott Flint for their suggestive courses in the short-story given at the University of Chicago.

E. M. A.

DELAWARE, OHIO, Sept. 1, 1906.

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THE SHORT-STORY

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

FROM the dawn of intellect some form of story-telling has held the foremost place in human interest. A mere glance over the history of literatures reveals their narrative foundations. The place of the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey," of the songs of the troubadours in France and the minnesingers in Germany, and of the chronicles and ballads of old England, is too well recognized to need special comment. What is perhaps more significant is the fact that, amid the multiplication of literary themes and literary forms, story-telling has continued to hold its own even to our day, and promises to take a yet higher place in the literature of the coming age. Narration in its varied form and matter claims the interest of every thinking man. The story holds this vast audience because it is so wholly human and furnishes a concrete, practical, personal, and infinitely sympathetic medium of expression.

Out of this commonest and most popular form of expression special forms have gradually shaped themselves: history, biography, epic poetry, drama, and prose fiction. And prose fiction, possibly the largest, loosest form of narrative, has separated at length into two great branches representative of two main moods and tendencies; namely, the realistic novel and the romance.

Until very recently the term *novel* has been taken loosely as covering almost all varieties of fiction, including the long, loose *picaresque* novel or tale of adventure characteristic of one branch of early eighteenth-century fiction, the bold and powerful pictures of contemporary life sketched by Richardson and Fielding and Smollett and culminating in the splendid realism of William Thackeray; and the perennial romance, with its glamour of far away, tracing its small beginnings back even farther than Sidney's "Arcadia," suffering suppression through the realistic genius of the eighteenth century, springing out again in Horace Walpole and Anne Radcliffe, and finding its true blossoming time in the age of Walter Scott. The history of these larger pieces of fiction has been that of successive waves of realism and romance. But to-day we are at a standstill, seeing for the first time an approach to equality in the products of these opposing schools.

There are novels *and* novels, — for the novel-mill is working overtime, — but there is no one preëminently great novel of the day.

It is very probable that the lack of one predominant type of novel may have had something to do with the increased interest in a hitherto neglected form of fiction. For the short-story has only recently been seen to have definite characteristics and become recognized as a distinctive work of art. It has been hinted that the short-story, when it shall have enlisted the best efforts of our greatest writers, may become more popular than the novel — that it may even displace the novel altogether. But this fear is not well grounded, inasmuch as the short-story aspires more and more definitely to the fulfilling of a distinct mission of its own, and is therefore becoming more and more sharply differentiated from the novel. The good novel never can suffer displacement by the good short-story, because their fields are different. So that it is hardly worth while to discuss the relative merits of novel and short-story as food for the emotions. One might as profitably compare the abstract values of lean meats and vegetables. Both have their special uses. And there is little danger that the growing interest in the short-story will take away the interest of the thoughtful reader in the novel. Giving, as it does, but the

condensed essence of life, the short-story as an exclusive diet would be likely to produce a sort of "emotional dyspepsia" in the interested reader.

The short-story is not, as many think it, a new kind of composition. It is old — quite as old as the form of fiction which we call the novel. Indeed, I am inclined to think, with Canby,[1] that it is very much older than the novel. The Book of Ruth, written about 450 B.C., is essentially a short-story. Some twenty-three hundred years have affected the technique of story-writing, bringing about in some directions such a remarkable development as to make plausible the assertion that the short-story is a nineteenth-century product. But twenty-three hundred years have not sufficed to rob this simple narrative of story interest for readers of to-day. The facts of the case are, that the short-story appeared in occasional excellence even before the time of the first novel worthy of the name; but the short-story waited almost a century longer than the novel for its period of development as a special form of art. The historical point worth noting is, that the short-story is not in its origin an outgrowth or an offshoot from the novel, although it is frequently spoken of as if it were a mere by-product of the novelist's art.

[1] The student should read the excellent introduction to Jessup and Canby's "The Book of the Short-Story," printed separately in the Yale Studies in English.

The short-story has, however, so much in common with the novel that it is worth while to try to mark off a boundary line. The novel aims to represent a large period or the whole of some particular life or lives; the short-story is a fragment. The novelist, endeavoring to render life in all its fulness, portrays exhaustively details which an artistic story-teller instinctively avoids. Where the realistic novel is complete, the short-story is suggestive. In the handling of material, then, the most striking difference between the novel and the short-story is that the problem of selection, or of suggestive omission and compression, is for the short-story writer of supreme importance. For the short-story can never, like the novel, give us the whole of life. It can only aim to present, in a vigorous, compressed, suggestive way, a simplification and idealization of a particular part or phase of life. In following out this more limited and specific aim, the short-story has necessarily a simpler and more clever plot: action more continuous, more coherent, more significant for characterization; time and place and point of view generally the same throughout; characters fewer and more striking, and presented under more unusual circumstances. In a word, the short-story has a unity that can be distinctly felt. The novel may or may not have one fundamental idea as its basis:

a fundamental idea of some sort is for the short-story, in the modern sense of the term, an absolute prerequisite. For the short-story of to-day aims not merely to recount a series of interesting events in chronological or logical order, but to create a vivid picture of a bit of life in such a way as to render a preconceived idea or impression. It has for its material not merely people and events, but people in their relations to one another and to their environment. In a word, the short-story material is a single *situation*.[1] The modern short-story differs in this respect from the novel, and also from the simple narrative or tale from which it sprang. The novel is concerned with life histories; and the simple narrative or tale, with an interesting sequence of events. The short-story, on the other hand, only suggests life histories by retrospect or hint of future or by presenting determining crises in the lives of characters; and it uses its series of events in accordance with a dominating motive, to render the impression of a situation.

Brander Matthews, in his "Philosophy of the Short-Story," lays great stress on this *unity of impression* — what Poe calls the "effect of totality" — as the mark of distinction between the short-

[1] For fuller development of this idea, see Canby's "The Modern Short-Story," *Dial*, Sept. 1, 1904.

story and the novel. And Canby, carrying the distinction still further, says that it is the *deliberate and conscious use of impressionistic methods*, together with the increasing emphasis on situation, that distinguishes the short-story of to-day from the tale or simple narrative and makes it seem a new work of art.

Limitation of range of material to a single situation in the lives of the main characters furnishes a fundamental unity of design. The typical short-story embodies a theme so simple as to demand no subdivisions. Very rarely will there be major and minor characters in groups, as in the novel; and almost never will there be anything like an underplot or secondary line of interest. It is only by such strict limitation of aim and subject-matter that the short-story can attain that complete and rounded unity which makes it, in the hands of a master artist, capable of a perfection of form that is almost lyric.

But the tremendous variety of motives possible to the short-story, and the wide range of material from which themes may be drawn, render it impossible to crystallize the story in any definite shape. Capable of very fine effects in miniature, the short-story is still the "most flexible literary form," and therefore the least amenable to rules. Partly

because of this lack of definite form, and partly because it is miniature work, the short-story has been altogether neglected by many masters of the larger form of fiction. But the fact that very few writers besides Stevenson and Kipling have had anything like equal success in the novel and the short-story, leads one to think that the two are distinct forms of art, demanding, if not different kinds of genius, at least very different habitual focussing of the imagination. It is true that many great novelists have trained their wings through these shorter flights. But it is equally true that the short-story, requiring, as it does, no sustained flight of the imagination, but rather concentration on a single issue, has somehow come to be regarded as work most suitable for novices. The variety of motives and perhaps the very lack of anything like uniformity in style and structure have made the short-story a perennially tempting field for amateurs. These are some of the reasons why short-story literature, though almost as old as time, contains so many specimens that are good, but so few that stand out as preëminently great. And the fact that the short-story has only recently emerged from the shadow of its sister arts and come into the field of criticism as a distinct artistic form is sufficient to account for the widespread lack of even such fundamental standards

of appreciation as are necessary to enable one to distinguish between the story which is readable, enjoyable, — even profitable, perhaps, — and that which deserves perpetuation as a masterpiece of fiction.

THE SHORT-STORY AND THE DRAMA

In scope and style, if not in subject-matter, the short-story of to-day is as nearly akin to the drama as to the novel. Indeed, it would seem that the growing emphasis on *situation* rather than a mere sequence of interesting events, the marked preference for presenting *crises* in the lives of characters, and the "deliberate and conscious use of *impressionistic* methods" must have been derived in great measure from a study of the technique of the drama. The story-writer, like the dramatist, is compelled by lack of space to present his situation effectively in a few strong strokes, and to render his main characters prominent in their true relations to each other and to their whole environment without the aid of many groups of lesser characters and without the background of a long series of minor events which prepare for and emphasize the climax. The artificial isolation of a limited number of people and events, the artistic heightening of dialogue, the concentration on a single issue, the vivid picturing of

a scene that is significant, are essentially dramatic. In a word, the drama is largely responsible for the brilliant technique which is one of the distinguishing features of modern story-writing. Strictly dramatic form is a drawback to the story; but the dramatic way of looking at a situation and many dramatic devices for heightening its effectiveness are not only useful but almost essential to the impression story of to-day. So that, in motive, in methods, and in its stimulating effect upon the imagination of the reader, the vivid impressionistic story is more nearly akin to the drama than to the novel. The main difference between the story motive and that of drama is that the story may treat a more commonplace theme and a less striking situation, with a climax less significant and intense. In concentration, the story ranks about midway between the novel and the drama.

RELATION TO SHORTER FORMS OF FICTION

It has been sufficiently emphasized that the short-story is not a cut-down novel and not a variety of prose drama. Neither is it an expanded anecdote, nor a mere narrative tale, nor a development of the informal essays of Addison and Steele. Its motive is more complex than that of the anecdote, more specific than that of the narrative tale, and less di-

dactic than that of the character-sketches of the *Tatler* and *Spectator* papers.

The *anecdote* is clearly distinguished from the short-story by Howells, when he says:[1] "The anecdote is palpably simple and single. It offers an illustration of character, or records a moment of action; the novella (short-story) embodies a drama and develops a type."

The term *tale*, in its old-fashioned meaning, was almost as broad as narration itself, including loosely not only most forms of the short-story then in vogue, but also much of the larger fiction which we now class under the terms *novel*, *novelette*, and *romance*. The style of the old tale was rambling, discursive; the subject-matter might be almost anything. At the call of a busy age, this loose, scattering sort of narrative gave way to short, sharp, strong, and clever bits of narrative distinguished by their unity, compression, and suggestive power. The term *tale* gave way to the term *short-story* as all-inclusive of this new branch of literature; but the name itself, though greatly changed and restricted, did not die away. It is now applied to a particular form of the short-story.

The tale of to-day is the story of a single incident or episode. The more stirring the incident, and the

[1] "Some Anomalies of the Short-Story," *North American*, September, 1901.

more pungent the style, the better the tale; for the interest of the tale is centred wholly in the action. Essential to the tale is absolute simplicity of plot and singleness of purpose. Suspense, surprise and climax, and careful handling of the action as to speed, intensity, and outcome, are all desirable if the subject-matter permits. But the distinguishing feature of the tale of to-day is its strict unity and its limitation to a single incident.

The short-story in its modern form began in the short, simple narrative which showed more or less conscious selection of significant details, with limitation of time, place, and number of characters, resulting in the unity that is a necessary accompaniment of simplicity of style and omission and compression. During the nineteenth century there came a marked and widespread development of the art of story-writing, resulting in what seemed a distinct nineteenth-century type. America, France, and Germany were the leaders in this movement. France best mastered the impressionistic methods; but the work of Irving and Hawthorne and Poe is of such importance that it gives America even to-day a claim to preëminence in this distinctively modern form of art. The short-story has been essayed in all great literatures; but it has its homes in America and France.

Canby says, in his essay on "The Modern Short-Story," in the *Dial* (Sept. 15, 1904): "The change in thought and feeling which has produced a more subtle, more analytic mind, that shifting of interests which has given the nineteenth century a distinctly individual tone, is the result of some mental evolution which has not been thoroughly analyzed. But this new method of story-telling is as dependent upon it, and upon what lies behind it, as nature poetry, or the psychological novel, or any other reflection of man's mind which is more characteristic of an age than of those which have preceded it."

CHAPTER II

GATHERING MATERIAL

ONE can give no more than hints as to possible sources of material for stories. To tabulate these sources would be as absurd as to instruct a painter how to see a picture in the faces and attitudes of the people he meets on the streets, where to see the possibility of a striking model, how to gather a landscape from the massing of clouds and trees and the sweeping slope of a valley-side. For the story-writer's subjects are infinitely diverse.

The natural story-teller finds his motives everywhere. He differs from other people only in his attitude toward his daily experience. He is ever alert to the dramatic situations that are constantly appearing to those who have the appreciative eye, and ever busy reflecting on the essential significance of these dramatic situations. It is his delight to observe and note the fresh, the striking, the unusual or interesting phases of the human life about him, to turn them over in his mind till they have taken definite new form, and send them forth again — his

own creation. The trained story-writer leaves off reading even his daily newspaper with his mind teeming with ideas, some of which may eventually suggest a story to him. A poem or an incident from a novel may be rich in imaginative association, suggesting a train of thought related but nevertheless distinct. Better still, every significant though trivial experience of its own has its story value for him. He seems to be lying in wait for happenings. To test a Berlin system, Mark Twain deliberately threw away his street-car ticket fifteen times, and each time was required to pay his fare. He made five hundred dollars from the story which he based upon this simple incident.

We say that a good story-writer must have imagination; but what do we mean by imagination? Is it some rare, God-given faculty or talent, completed at the start, or is it a power of the mind common to us all, but in some stronger and finer and more perfectly trained? Rather the latter. For, granted that there are a few people in the world who are essentially dull, practical, commonplace,—or, as we generally say, unimaginative,—the great majority of people have imaginations which are sleeping or starving or actively at work in some unprofitable, perhaps insane, direction. The question is, how to feed and regulate the imagination so that it shall be

not only sane and healthy, but productive of something of æsthetic or utilitarian value.

Modern psychology has done much to simplify our ideas of this mysterious power that we call the imagination; and it has rendered education an invaluable service in emphasizing the now familiar fact that imagination, being a process, must have materials to work on. It is not worth while to set about the work of training the imagination until you have begun to feed it. This means, very simply, appreciating the value of the senses as avenues for getting fresh material. "How few materials," says Emerson, "are yet used by our arts! The mass of creatures and qualities are still hid and expectant."

The need of careful and accurate observation cannot be too often pointed out. Most of us use our eyes a little now and then, but let the other senses sleep. Burroughs, in one of his outdoor essays, likens the perceptive faculties to a trap, delicately and lightly set. But those of most of us, he says, "are so rusty that only a bear would suffice to spring the trap." It is true that most of us, instead of being alert with all our senses, are habitually preoccupied so that we miss all but the great and startling incidents of the life about us. A study of the beautiful descriptions by the great poets and prose writers will do much to convince the doubter that

fine literary effects rest back very often upon fine observation as a basis. Whether it be a realistic sketch of everyday life or purest fantasy or romance, no story will appeal to human beings unless it is grounded on a keen observation of the essential phases of actual human nature in its actual environment. For psychology has told us, once for all, that without fact there can be no play of the imagination. Facts about outer life cannot be evolved wholly from within. In the very beginning of his work, then, the story-writer must lay his senses open to the world about him. He must observe the speech and actions of his fellow-men, study their expressions, reflect upon their characters, sympathetically interpret motives, leaping over the bridge of personality and making common cause with other people's feelings. And eventually he must be able to reproduce on the stage of his own mind something of that wonderful interaction by which we human beings are woven and interwoven into the complex web of humanity.

Important as is the gathering of facts through observation, this in itself is no adequate preparation for writing stories. Mere facts about people and their deeds will make narration, but not short-story. Fiction of the higher sort aims at something greater than mere transcription: it aims at original creation.

To this end, it seeks for its material not mere fact with its cold superficial reality, but the kind of fact that embodies the whole of things — a complete human being, mind and soul and body, manner and motive, circumstance and character — such a live, warm fact as the throbbing, pulsing, human life. To this end it aims, too, at comprehending the spirit of the actual and the real rather than its mere external manifestations. The value of facts for fiction lies mainly in what they represent, in the suggestion or meaning they convey.

It follows from this that there are plenty of actualities which never could acquire a story value. As actualities, they may even have the interest of the unusual, the unique, and yet be unavailable for literary purposes. The mere fact that it "happened to have happened so" is not the slightest guarantee of plot success. Sufficient proof of this is furnished in the thrilling narratives of adventure, of whose truth we are so positively assured. The more thrilling the incident, the greater the strain on the credulity of the reader; and, consequently, the finer the skill of the writer if he achieves verisimilitude. No mere actuality can make an improbable incident seem true in fiction. A student wrote a story of a sensational rescue of a somnambulist by a policeman who rushed up to the fourth story of an apartment house,

fitted a skeleton key into a door, jumped from a window to a roof, and captured the somnambulist before she could succeed in walking off into the street below. The main incident is narrated thus: —

"O'Sullivan had crept steadily upon her. He noticed a heavy guy wire extending across the street by her side. As she unconsciously stepped forward to her death, he leaped and grasped her with one arm, seizing the guy wire with the other. The shock awoke the young lady. She shrieked in fright and collapsed. By a sharp command, O'Sullivan brought her to her senses. And, as the wire swayed and creaked under the unusual strain, the young lady climbed on to the roof. In a moment more O'Sullivan followed." This story is based on a news paragraph purporting to be true. Nevertheless, the credulity of the reader suffers a heavier strain even than the guy wire. The amateur, confident in the power of mere facts, is prone to rely on them to work out their own plausibility. It might almost be said, without attempt at paradox, that most of the outlandish and impossible plots furnished by young students turn out to be narratives of fact. Truth is sometimes so very much stranger than fiction that it is dangerous to handle it. Take, for instance, another story of adventure. A hospitable old couple received a stranger who asked

for a night's lodging. Toward midnight he descended noiselessly to their bedroom, armed with a large knife and a hatchet. "Raising the hatchet, he struck the old lady full in the face. This awakened her husband, who seized the blade of the knife just as it was about to enter his heart. A short struggle ensued. The old lady quickly recovered from the effects of the blow, slipped from her bed, and escaped to the house of a neighbor." The author goes on to remark, naïvely, "The escape of the old lady so alarmed the burglar that he turned and fled." This proved to be a narrative of fact, but it was not short-story: it sounded more like common lying. Whether he has or has not facts to fall back upon, the story-writer must proceed as if it were his business to "make the thing that is not as the thing that is." The materials may be striking, but they must not seem improbable.

Another potent reason why the story-writer should not depend solely on the uniqueness of his facts for interest is, that such facts leave little or no room for originality of treatment or imaginative elaboration. Originality in the handling of facts is mainly a matter of interpreting from an individual point of view. It requires sometimes the reading of a meaning into a situation and interpreting it to other people. The story-writer's aim is, to render the subjective signifi-

cance of a striking scene, event, or character and, through interpretation, to give it something like a permanent and universal literary value.

One of the most important parts of the author's work is generally done unconsciously. Narration is very dependent on the process of reminiscence. If one remembers a bit of story material, it is generally because it made one definite impression on him. It was surrounded by numerous other items of experience — perhaps so buried in the mass that its meaning was hidden to less sensitive observers; but to the author it has appealed in some definite way. He remembers that appeal, that impression, above all the insignificant attending circumstances. These he can, perhaps, recall at will; but they are of small importance, save as they furnish the actual setting. Memory, then, has accented the original impression by discarding the insignificant and secondary, leaving patent only the heart of the situation. Spontaneously, but in accordance with the necessary methods of literary art, the author has moved from complexity to simplicity of material and purpose. He has conceived the aim of conveying a single impression through the presentation of an interesting story situation.

He must now cast about for the best form. It may be that he has added so much of the subjective

and personal that the original form is quite out of the question; he must invent for his idea a larger shape. What that shall be, is a new problem for every story.

One of the most important questions of method is, what amount of detail shall be preserved. The use of significant detail is one of the distinctive marks of the short-story. But of course anything like the full presentation is impossible. Only the striking and suggestive must be chosen — the hint which will imply the whole; for there is no point in a mere copy of the dull commonplaces of our life. It is a part of the author's work to clear away the meaningless, that the reader may find thrown into relief the dramatic meaning hidden in these common things. For, as Stevenson declares, "A short-story is not a transcript of life, to be judged by its exactitude, but a simplification of some side or point of life, to stand or fall by its significant simplicity."

A story is significant and simple because it is worked over by a person — because it is made his own. It is the individual element that makes it literary, giving it meaning and purpose, and an emotional coloring which shall distinguish it from other works of its kind. The emotional coloring is a more or less accurate reflection of the author's mood or temperament or settled character. Before the story

can take on this emotional coloring or tone, so essential to its literary vitality, it must really belong to its author and be a part of him. It is chiefly because a bit of experience is ours that we care to tell it or to write it as a story. Another's experience can never be quite so intimate as our own unless we are blessed with warm sympathy and perfect intuition. Thus it is that one's own experience is better material than all the outward facts which he can gather. He will, of course, see most clearly that which is within his range of vision. And he would do well to start with this, remembering that, except in writing romance, it is unwise to undertake portrayal of that which is hopelessly beyond the bounds of his experience. For he must believe what he writes, for the time. That is, he must seem to have thorough confidence in his material as probable experience. Says Cable,[1] "No author, from whatever heaven, earth, or hell of actual environment he may write, can produce a living narrative of motives, passions, and fates without having first felt the most of it and apprehended it all, in his own inner life."

It is certainly the individual element that gives the breath of life. This does not mean that the author should be egoistic, in any sense of the word. He should, however, be sufficiently self-conscious

[1] "Afterthoughts of a Story-Teller," *North American*, 158: 16.

and introspective to gauge other people's experiences by his own. This he cannot do unless he has lived a broad and deep imaginative life. He must be on the alert for new material — watchful, observant. He must make notes if he cannot trust his memory. He must brood over his material until it acquires a personal warmth, and adopt it for his own. He must enter sympathetically into the innermost life of the creatures whom he has made to move across the stage of his imagination; for "a man may not describe humanity if he have not humanity within him." Only through sympathy and humankindness can the individual experience acquire the universal interest that entitles it to rank as literature.

THE NOTE-BOOK

A large and miscellaneous note-book is of inestimable value to the writer of fiction. No human memory is sufficiently comprehensive to retain in available shape even a small part of the material necessary for writing fiction. Impressions are very fleeting; and the imagination cannot always be driven back along the same road without the use of a spur. The student would do well, therefore, to keep a note-book in which he should jot down not only ideas on the theory of the short-story and impressions of stories which have especially interested

him, but more particularly all the material he has on hand for original work: names, traits, features, faces, characters; places suitable for story setting; interesting situations, incidents, anecdotes illustrative of character; bits of speech that have dramatic force; ideas for the construction of ingenious plots; or, ideas and impressions which will serve as central themes for stories.

A methodical person will have his note-book neatly classified. But the imaginative person is not always so precise in the arrangement of his productions as he is fertile in invention. A note-book is, or should be, essentially a private matter — its value, its service to the owner. And if the owner finds an easy, spontaneous, scattering note-book pleasant in the making and available for using, he should feel free to keep that kind of book. Many people are frightened away from preserving their experience in note-books by the idea that they must write something in them every day at a set time — a sort of soul-confession like a diary; and many others, by the idea that they must make their notes trim, precise, and regular, as if they might at any time be exposed to the inspection of the public. But what would be drearier reading, after all, than a petrified, impersonal, correct note-book, should it ever come to light?

A literary note-book that was of real value to its owner is Hawthorne's "English and American Notes." The American notes are especially free and easy, and particularly rich in story material. They are personal, spontaneous, and without anything but a scattering chronological arrangement. The most poetical fantasy may jostle an account of Hawthorne's "continual warfare with the squash-bugs"; or, a delicate symbolical idea for a tale, a homely narrative of how he was hit in the eye by a piece of wood which he was chopping. Hawthorne gathered peculiar names: Miss Asphyxia Davis; Flesh and Blood, a firm of butchers; Miss Polly Syllable, a schoolmistress. He jotted down chance phrases that occurred to him: "A life, generally of a grave hue, may be said to be *embroidered* with occasional sports and fantasies." He diligently gathered more details of costume and personal appearance than he could make actual use of in his stories: —

"Madame Cutts, at the last of these entertainments, wore a black damask gown, and cuffs with double lace ruffles, velvet shoes, blue silk stockings, white and silver stomacher. The daughter and granddaughters in rich brocades and yellow satin. Old Major Cutts in brown velvet, laced with gold, and a large wig. . . . The ladies wore bell-hoops, high-heeled shoes, paste buckles, silk stockings, and

enormously high head-dresses, with lappets of Brussels lace hanging thence to the waist. . . . The date assigned to all this about 1690." [1]

In short, every kind of material finds its place in Hawthorne's note-book. Much of it is trivial and of transient interest, and much of the really promising literary material has never been reclaimed. But, on the other hand, we find brief jottings of the ideas that animated those symbolic stories which gave Hawthorne high rank among the half-dozen masters of short-story writing.

[1] "American Note-Book," 2:55.

CHAPTER III

THE MOTIVE AS THE SOURCE OF PLOT

It is a familiar principle that a story must have plot; but where shall the plot come from? Something in the author's experience, real or imagined, must furnish the plot-germ. Plot starts most commonly with an idea originating in the impression made by a single incident, in a situation experienced or invented, in a chance mood or fancy, or in a conception of character. The starting-point for the plot may be called the story *theme*, the *idea*, the *plot-germ*, or the *motive*. By the term *motive* is meant whatever in the material has served as the spur or stimulus to write, the moving force of a story — in short, its reason for existence. It may be objected that many stories have no such kernel of meaning and, apparently, no reason for existence. This is very true. The magazines are crammed with unsignificant stories fit only to fill an idle quarter of an hour or to rest a weary mind. But the "no-motive" story is a mere happen-so in fiction; and the short-story that lays claim to rank as literature must have a real reason for existence. It must have a point.

The beginner in story-writing is very likely to mistake the meaning of plot and to believe that it requires as a starting-point a remarkable instance of luck, chance, or fate. The first plot assignment to a class in narration is likely to bring in varied accounts of young folks' pranks, such as baking a cotton pie, hiding a buggy under a straw-pile, or escorting a cow to the top of a public building. Arrived at the conclusion that *trick* and *plot* are not identical, the student may still prefer narratives of accidents, surprises, curious coincidences. Then comes the beginner's joy in the construction of ingenious plot, such as the story with a reversal. A clever story of this sort is readable,— some of Aldrich's are excellent (*e.g.* "Marjorie Daw," *Atlantic*, 31 : 407),— but it is not a story which appears better on a second reading. Surprises ill suffer repetition.

The amateur on a hunt for unused material would possibly be overjoyed to run across ideas like these which Hawthorne jotted down: —

"Two persons, by mutual agreement, to make their wills in each other's favor, then to wait impatiently for one another's death, and both to be informed of the desired event at the same time. Both, in most joyous sorrow, hasten to be present at the funeral, meet, and find themselves both hoaxed." ("American Note-Book," p. 12.) "A fellow without

money, having a hundred and seventy miles to go, fastened a chain and padlock to his legs, and lay down to sleep in a field. He was apprehended and carried *gratis* to a jail in the town whither he desired to go." ("American Note-Book," p. 14.) But it is worth noting that Hawthorne used neither of these ideas for a plot, and that he never used plots of this sort. It would have been inconsistent with his conception of the aim of fiction.

While the ingenious plot with a reversal or surprise — the hoax-plot — cannot be counted among the highest, there is one form of the ingenious plot which deserves a higher rank. The detective story is a real study in plot construction, involving the presentation of a situation and the reduction of that situation to its causes. It differs from other plots in that it presents a mysterious situation and then works *backward* to its solution. The solution is the end. The detective plot is a puzzle solved. A few masters have given it masterly treatment. Poe and his disciple, Doyle, have set themselves apart by their treatment of this plot form. The interest of "The Gold-Bug" and "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" is not, however, to be confounded with that of the lurid "literature" so delectable to the romantic-minded youngster. The secret of the fascination of the cheap detective story lies not so much in the

fearful ingenuity of plot as in the thrilling situations independently developed in the action. Most of us have known a small boy who got his first detective story from some forbidden source and then sneaked off to the haymow or the attic or the highest seat in the old apple tree, there to experience delightful thrills over the blood-curdling adventures of Diamond Dick and Soapstone Sam. The life presented in those long columns of eye-wearing print is not his kind of life at all; but it is life — thrilling life, crammed full of excitement. And, oblivious to the world about him, our young romancer plunges along with his hero, caring little that he sinks into a bottomless pit in one chapter and reappears in the next, only disfigured by a slight bruise on his marble forehead. One lock of his raven hair is a little awry, perhaps, but here he is on hand just in the nick of time, our gentleman of heroic adventure. The cheap detective story relies not at all on the probability of the plot as a whole (if indeed it can fairly be said to have a plot),[1] but merely on the interest of the separate situations. The masterly detective plot, on the other hand, is a genuine exercise in deductive logic dressed out in the form of fiction.

[1] An interesting account of the writing of sensational stories is quoted from the *New York Sun* in the *Writer*, August, 1903.

A single incident may furnish the motive for a plot. That is to say, the main action may be found ready-made, and simply be recounted in such a way as to bring out the significance of the facts. Some of the best stories of Richard Harding Davis originated in incidents gathered from experience. "Octave Thanet" works in this way. Maupassant's productiveness may be traced back in part to the daily newspaper as a source of plot. The incident must, of course, be interpreted, subjectified, rendered significant by the author. And character must be invented to fit the incident, after its interpretation is determined.

A chance imaginative impression may develop into a genuine story mood: "An old volume in a large library. Every one to be afraid to unclasp and open it, because it was said to be a book of magic." (Hawthorne, "American Note-Book," p. 14.) The hint was found too small a motive for a whole story, but is used to good advantage for impressionistic effect in "Doctor Heidegger's Experiment." "To make a story out of a scarecrow, giving it odd attributes," is the starting-point for the fantastic story, "Feathertop."

One of Hawthorne's most successful stories, judged by modern tests, is the impressionistic sketch, "The White Old Maid." In view of the marked unity

of tone and atmosphere, and the striking suggestiveness of the situation, it is interesting to discover the starting-point in a unified impression of character, requiring to be made plausible by presenting circumstances: —

"A change from a gay young girl to an old woman; the melancholy events, the effects of which have clustered around her character, and gradually imbued it with their influence, till she becomes a lover of sick-chambers, taking pleasure in receiving dying breaths and in laying out the dead; also leaving her mind full of funeral reminiscences, and possessing more acquaintances beneath the burial turf than above it."

Sometimes a mere physical impression may be made significant: "A person with an ice-cold hand — his right hand, which people ever afterward remember when once they have grasped it." (Hawthorne, "American Note-Book," p. 56.) Sometimes the impression is psychological: "A dreadful secret to be communicated to several people of various characters, — grave or gay, — and they all to become insane, according to their characters, by the influence of the secret. . . ." "The influence of a peculiar mind, in close communion with another, to drive the latter into insanity." ("American Note-Book," p. 102.)

A strong story may be made from a psychological impression of an imaginary character: —

"A man, virtuous in his general conduct, but committing habitually some monstrous crime, as murder, and doing this without the sense of guilt, but with a peaceful conscience, habit, probably, reconciling him to it; but something (for instance, discovery) occurs to make him sensible of his enormity. His horror then." Stevenson's "Markheim," a powerful psychological study of a mood, must have originated from a similar conception.

The development of such hints as these would naturally result in the story of a mood. Most of Poe's effects are due to the working out of a mood in such a way as to stamp it most vividly on the reader's imagination. Plot there is always in Poe; but the plot is, with two or three notable exceptions, kept subordinate to the mood. Details of plot are slight; the characters, mere puppets. All is arranged to work out a single preconceived impression. "The Black Cat," "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Pit and the Pendulum," "The Cask of Amontillado," "Berenice," "Ligeia," "The Masque of the Red Death," and "The Fall of the Melancholy House of Usher" excellently portray the tragic, weird, and sombre moods peculiar to Poe's genius. Kipling, Maupassant, Balzac, Hawthorne, Harte,

and Garland, all make the presentation of a mood one of the essential features of their best short-stories. The stories of the weird, the horrible, the fantastic, the romantic, the supernatural, depend for their effect upon the suggestion of a mood.

Closely related to the story of a single mood is that of a special sentiment, such as the pathetic, the tragic, and the humorous story. The various emotions of friendship, love, and devotion are also sufficient motives for a story.

Legitimate, also, is the realistic motive of picturing faithfully the life of a special class, profession, locality, or time. Here the aim may go no farther than artistic representation, or it may include that of information. The best stories of this class include also a sympathetic interpretation of a bit of human nature or human life; so that they are not only artistic and instructive, but broadly humanitarian in spirit.

The germ of the modern impressionistic story is very frequently an imagined situation, such as these, taken from Hawthorne's "American Note-Book": —

"The situation of a man in the midst of a crowd, yet as completely in the power of another, life and all, as if they two were in the deepest solitude." (p. 105.)

"The race of mankind to be swept away, leaving all their cities and works. Then another human pair to be placed in the world, endowed with native intelligence like Adam and Eve, but knowing nothing of their predecessors or of their own nature and destiny. They, perhaps, to be described as working out this knowledge by their sympathy with what they saw, and by their own feelings." (p. 22.)

"A rich man leaves by will his mansion and estate to a poor couple. They remove into it and find there a darksome servant whom they are forbidden by will to turn away. He becomes a torment to them; and, in the *finale*, he turns out to be the former master of the estate." (p. 32.)

Contrast furnishes the motive for many a strong story of Maupassant's. It is the force of Stevenson's "A Lodging for the Night"; it adds much to the effectiveness of Harte's "Outcasts of Poker Flat." It is in the story of character that contrast is most valuable. Hawthorne's notes show many conceptions of character involving contrasting elements, such as this: —

"A father-confessor, — his reflections on character, and the contrast of the inward man with the outward, as he looks around on his congregation, all whose secret sins are known to him." ("American Note-Book," 2 : 56.)

In "A Second-Rate Woman," Kipling gives us such a contrast in the unexpected revelation of nobility of character (the more unexpected in Kipling because it is of a woman). In "A Bank Fraud" he has achieved a double contrast. Reggie in himself is a surprise as he develops, and the contrast between Reggie and Riley makes the surprise emphatic. "Up the Coulée," one of Hamlin Garland's strongest stories, is founded upon a contrast between two characters. To the very last paragraph the story is a contrast between the weak man whom circumstances have bolstered into success and the man of native strength whom circumstances have cheated of his life's chance. Returning to find his brother cramped and soured by the narrow and difficult situation, the successful man endeavors to gain the other's good will and to put himself back into the old conditions. The effort is without avail. The problem is not solved, but the impression left with the reader at the close is that of the inevitable clash of two widely differing temperaments forcibly brought together: —

"The two men stood there face to face, hands clasped, the one fair-skinned, full-lipped, handsome in his neat suit; the other tragic, sombre in his softened mood, his large, long, rugged Scotch face bronzed with sun and scarred with wrinkles that had

histories, like the sabre cuts of a veteran, the record of his battles."

The half-hearted reconciliation does not remove the reader's impression of the hopelessness of the situation. He feels called upon to blame some one for the harshness of it, but is at a loss how to pronounce his moral judgment.

"Up the Coulée" is not merely a contrast between two men; it is a real problem plot. In a problem plot, incidents, as well as characters, are chosen after the main fact. The situation is presented like an algebraic problem. It may or may not be solved within the story. The situation must be a strong one, well worth solving. It must not be baldly thrust upon the reader, as in the beginning of a student's theme: "John Long had two ruling passions, and it waited to be seen which was to dominate him."

Maupassant's "A Coward," "The Necklace," and "A Piece of String," Balzac's "A Passion in the Desert," Poe's "Bertrand B," and Kipling's "Bimi" are excellent examples of the problem plot. A unique problem is presented in the August *Pearson's* for 1903, in the story of a white man who gradually turned black, and of the resulting behavior of his friends toward him.

The most common form of the problem plot is

that of the triangular relation sometimes called the *three-leaved clover* plot, concerning two men and one woman or two women and one man. It was William Black, I believe, who said that he could not understand why writers were ever at a loss for new plots, because, so long as there were two girls and a man or two men and a girl in the world, there would be material for an infinite number of novels. Such a relationship furnishes, sometimes, a fascinating problem, involving the play of passion, jealousy, danger, fear, surprise, remorse, repentance, sacrifice, etc., arising out of the sheer force of the situation.

The problem plot may involve an ethical motive, as in Hamlin Garland's "A Branch Road." This is the story of a country boy who is teased by his sweetheart's flirtations and goes away in wounded pride. Years later he returns, to find her married to his rival and leading a miserable life, abused by husband and mother-in-law, and the centre of continual low squabbles. She has lost her beauty and is worn and old — a purely pathetic figure. But Will is true to her and proposes what seems to him the only way out of the situation. Taking the youngest child, Will and Agnes set out together. The author pronounces no ethical judgment on any part of the action; but, in closing the gloomy tale, he does give us a rather significant glimpse of sky: "The sun

shone on the dazzling, rustling wheat; the fathomless sky, blue as a sea, bent above them — and the world lay before them." The situation is significant, compelling; and the reader inevitably follows Will and Agnes further and predicts for them a wretched or a happy fate.

The story of a crisis in the life of a character is one of the highest forms of short-story. It is the form most dependent on motive or idea. Rarely this will be a religious motive, occasionally a spiritual one; but most frequently it is simply ethical. The ethical motive may be of importance only for the individual, or it may also affect society. The story of purpose which is animated by a social motive presents questions of the day in the guise of fiction: strikes, labor, education, philanthropy, politics, and municipal problems. Sometimes the purpose is, to reveal conditions; sometimes it is, to suggest a remedy. The latter aim is somewhat aside from the purpose of story-writing, but it has proved a popular source of interest in our day.

Sometimes the motive of a story is an abstract idea which can be expressed in a phrase, a sentence, or a brief paragraph. The theme of "Silas Marner" may be expressed as "the influence of the love of a child on the lonely and embittered nature of a hermit. It is fully written out within the story: —

"In old days there were angels who came and took men by the hand and led them away from the city of destruction. We see no white-winged angels now. But yet men are led away from threatening destruction: a hand is put into theirs, which leads them forth gently toward a calm and bright land, so that they look no more backward; and the hand may be a little child's."

Almost identical is the theme of Mary Wilkins Freeman's "The Solitary": only it is a broken-down consumptive who reclaims the hermit. In Kipling's "Baa-Baa Black Sheep," the clew to the degeneration of Punch is given thus: "By the light of the sordid knowledge she had revealed to him, he paid her back full tale." Similarly, in Ruth Stuart's "A Note of Scarlet," the "moral" comes out gently in the degenerate Melissa's sigh: "Deary, deary me, how far wrong one bad act will take a person! Only three days ago I stopped counting my strands." The motive of Hawthorne's character study, "Ethan Brand," is clearly designated: —

"Thus Ethan Brand became a fiend. He began to be so from the moment that his moral nature had ceased to keep the pace of improvement with his intellect."

It must not, however, be hastily concluded that

the story motive, the inspiring force, is always identical with its *moral*, even if it should have a distinct expression of a moral. The moral to "The Prophetic Pictures" is appended, with less than Hawthorne's usual delicacy, to the close: —

"Is there not a deep moral in the tale? Could the result of one or all our deeds be shadowed forth and set before us, some would call it fate and hurry onward, others be swept along by their passionate desires, and none be turned aside by the prophetic pictures."

But the true imaginative motive — a larger one than this — is expressed on the page before: —

"The painter seemed to hear the step of Destiny approaching behind him on its progress toward its victims. A strange thought darted into his mind. Was not his own the form in which that Destiny had embodied itself, and he a chief agent of the coming evil which he had foreshadowed?"

The use of the abstract idea, the spiritual truth, the moral teaching, as a source of story plot may be best studied in the symbolic stories of Hawthorne. In the "American Note-Book" (p. 296), Hawthorne writes: —

"The semblance of a human face to be found on the side of a mountain, or in the fracture of a small stone, by a *lusus naturæ*. The face is an object of

curiosity for years and centuries, and by and by a boy is born, whose features gradually assume the aspect of that portrait. At some critical juncture the resemblance is found to be perfect. A prophecy may be connected."

This forms the working plot for "The Great Stone Face"; but, by comparing the impression made by this note with that made by the story, one cannot fail to discover the importance of the addition of the prophecy. The point of the story lies in the symbolism.

The symbolic motive in Hawthorne is saved from abstractness by being conveyed through appropriate physical images, such as the scarlet letter embroidered on the breast of Georgiana, the bright butterfly in "The Artist of the Beautiful," and the little hand on the cheek of Aylmer's wife ("The Birthmark"). Such an idea is jotted down in its most general form:[1]—

"To symbolize moral or spiritual disease by disease of the body; as thus,—when a person committed any sin, it might appear in some form on the body, — this to be brought out."

"Lady Eleanore's Mantle" is such a story of poetical retribution. Stricken with smallpox from the fatally infectious mantle, the once haughty

[1] "American Note-Book," 2: 59.

Lady Eleanore cries out: "The curse of Heaven hath stricken me because I would not call man my brother nor woman sister. I wrapped myself in pride as in a mantle and scorned the sympathies of nature, and therefore has nature made this wretched body the medium of a dreadful sympathy. You are avenged, they are all avenged, Nature is avenged."

Hawthorne seems to have been especially impressed with the idea of retribution for tampering with any natural law. We see the idea in its extreme form in the following incident: —

"The case quoted in Combe's Physiology of a young man of great talents and profound knowledge of chemistry, who had in view some new discovery of importance. In order to put his mind into the highest possible activity, he shut himself up for several successive days, and used various methods of excitement. He had a singing-girl, he drank spirits, smelled penetrating odors, sprinkled Cologne water round the room, etc. Eight days thus passed when he was seized with a fit of frenzy which terminated in mania."

There is a grim irony in these facts which reminds one of the outline plot of "The Ambitious Guest," one of Hawthorne's strongest stories with the fate motive. We can imagine Hawthorne commenting on the young chemist's frustrated ambition as he

does of the incident in "Rappaccini's Daughter" as only another instance of the "fatality of all such efforts of perverted wisdom." "Ethan Brand" and "The Birthmark" present other phases of the same theme.

The idea for "The Birthmark" appears in the "American Note-Book" (p. 206) in this shape: —

"A person to be the death of his beloved in trying to raise her to more than mortal perfection; yet this should be a comfort to him for having aimed so highly and holily." The whole force of the tragedy could hardly have been present in the author's mind when he made that note. It would seem as if the story had grown vastly in the making, and that the author's sense of the fitness of things had led him to eliminate from the story the somewhat jarring note of consolation through high and holy aim. The general theme is announced outright, early in the story: —

"In those days, when the comparatively recent discovery of electricity and other kindred mysteries of nature seemed to open new paths into the region of miracle, it was not unusual for the love of science to rival the love of woman in its depth and absorbing energy."

And, more definitely, the application is made to the characters of the story: —

"Aylmer's love for his young wife might prove the stronger of the two, but it could only be by intertwining itself with his love of science and uniting the strength of the latter to its own."

The symbolism of the fairy hand is of importance for the plot. "The crimson hand expressed the ineludible grip in which mortality clutches the highest and purest of earthly mould, degrading them into kindred with the lowest, and even with the very brutes." Aylmer regarded it as "the symbol of his wife's liability to sin, sorrow, decay, and death," whereas it proved to be "the bond by which an angelic spirit kept itself in union with a mortal frame." On the interpretation of this symbol hangs the tragedy.

We have in "Rappaccini's Daughter" an ethical problem of modern application, if not of modern treatment. It is an experiment in poisons — "a lovely woman nourished with poisons from her birth upward, until her whole nature was so imbued with them that she herself had become the most deadly poison in existence. Poison was her element of life. With that rich perfume of her breath she blasted the very air." It is the story of a father who "was not restrained from offering up a child in this horrible manner as the victim of his insane zeal for science." The theme is tragic, and the story charged

with emotion, rather than abstract. Indeed, I think it might almost be called Hawthorne's nearest approach to dramatic characterization within the limits of the short-story.

Such abstract ideas and symbolic motives as Hawthorne's are not by any means essential to short-stories. As a matter of fact, a young writer would have difficulty in making such themes sufficiently concrete to suit our modern tastes. But Hawthorne's stories may all be profitably studied; for they rarely lack a definite and tangible idea, which, though it may be expressed outright, is seldom crudely put. The point to be remembered is, that a story cannot take high rank unless it has an inspiring motive of some sort to furnish it a reason for existence.

CHAPTER IV

PLOT

PLOT is the management of the continuous line of action underlying the whole progress of the story. It concerns the sequence of events. In a simple tale of adventure, where the interest depends almost altogether on the intrinsic worth of the material, the problem of arrangement hardly appears. Proportion is here the main consideration. The problem is, how to make the action constantly progress and increase in intensity toward an effective climax. The tale of adventure is almost without plot, because its effect is nothing more than that of a narrative of interesting fact.

But in every story which has a motive other and higher than that of incident, plot is of importance. For the action of such a story is of interest as illustrating a special motive; and incidents and events must be rearranged in such a way as to bring out the author's meaning most effectively. In the story with a distinct meaning and purpose, the chronological order of events must give way to the logical, if the

two do not happen to coincide. And in almost every case, the actual proportion of events must give way to dramatic foreshortening and expansion. For plot becomes here the outline of the theme — the plan for working out an idea.

In its broadest sense, plot is plan. As such, it is essential to every story. A certain class of writers who aim to represent little bits of real life without caring especially to render their significance say that plot is non-essential. They say, too, that there is no such thing as plot in real life. It is very true that most experience does not fall naturally into plot arrangement. Once in a while that happens, but oftener the plot fails of its logical outcome. Still, it is the story-teller's business to pick out the plot in life, and, where it fails, to complete it with his art. To forbid the writer to fashion his material in such a way as to reveal his meaning and his spirit is as absurd as to advise the young writer of the didactic essay to jot down all his feelings, thoughts, and fancies in the exact order of their occurrence, without reference to their relevance or their importance for his particular theme. No kind of literature, whether of thought or of feeling, can be made without especial attention to arrangement of material with reference to purpose. If action is aimless, or events accidental, the story-writer must discard them

or bend them to his purpose. He is not bound to transfer the whole of human life — that would be impossible. Human actions are interesting only as they tend toward the realization of some end. There is too much of the aimless and the commonplace in real life; we can all see more of it than we wish without betaking ourselves to the world of fiction. The reader has a right to demand that the author pick out only the significant and essential; for this is the only worthy matter.

If there is any doubt as to the worth of plot, consider for a moment the effect of the stories of Henry James, William Howells, and others of their school. Here we have exquisite analysis of character and motive, fine description, and dialogue polished almost beyond recognition. Yet who but a pedant will pretend to the keenest interest in them? Few people would sit up half a night because they couldn't bear to leave the story. Such stories have a real interest, but it is of a pale and intellectual sort, because there is little stirring action and almost no attempt at climax. The works of the psychological realists are certainly not improved by their lack of movement and *dénouement.* The short-story should have outcome. Some element of the situation should be changed in the progress of the narrative.

Plot involves climax, but not necessarily surprise.

If a writer is ingenious enough to surprise us at the end of a story, it is well enough. But if all stories depended for their success on ingenuity of plot, story literature would rapidly decay. The best stories depend very little on the element of surprise. They have emphatic climax; but climax means a steady heightening of interest to its full close, rather than the mental or emotional jerk occasioned by surprise. Novelty and interest in the situations throughout the story, with an increasing interest in the *dénouement*, are the essential demands of plot.

Complexity of plot is extremely undesirable for the short-story. In rare instances it succeeds very well, as in Poe's "The Gold-Bug." But even here characters must be sacrificed almost entirely to plot purposes. "The Gold-Bug" is the best of its kind, but not the best kind of short-story. The simple plot is most natural and often the most powerful. It is broader, deeper, more lifelike than the ingenious or complex plot. It is also best adapted to the scope and purpose of the short-story. The short-story must be dominated by a single purpose or meaning, and must produce strict unity of impression. To this end, singleness of plot is necessary. The story has no space for episode. Only a hint at outside history is allowable. An adept at hinting can furnish by this means all the variety needed in so

short a piece of work. And, by avoiding the complex plot (which necessarily involves digressions) he can make all the lines of interest run straight to their single goal. A double plot is rarely successful, because it means a division of interest and consequently a lack of unity. For the short-story of the modern type, simplicity, unity, brevity, and suggestive force are the qualities most to be desired; and the complex and interwoven plot is therefore to be shunned.

The beginner in story-writing generally overestimates the value of the novel and the clever plot. If he were wise, he would pay more attention to the filling in. The poorest story in the newspaper often shows considerable fertility of invention, but with a fatal lack of filling and of style. The outline of the greatest story might read like the bald sentences of a primer. Save for purposes of analysis, the plot cannot be separated from the story as a whole. A story cannot be analyzed alive. It is the motive rather than the bare outline of the action that gives the story its originality and its final worth. Are there only thirteen plots? There are a hundred times as many motives. Change one element, and you have modified the whole.

In constructing the plot or plan, the writer must begin at the other end, since the end determines the

course of the narrative. Poe says: "Nothing is more clear than that every plot worth the name must be elaborated to its *dénouement* before anything be attempted with the pen. It is only with the *dénouement* constantly in view that we can give a plot its indispensable air of consequence or causation by making the incidents, and especially the tone at all points, tend to the development of the intention."

A consideration of the main incident will keep the writer from admitting dry, uninteresting, and meaningless details. It will also insure his admitting all the necessary matter. The ingenious story, for example, must have the conditions presented fairly and fully, if the surprise is to count for anything. In "A Love Knot" (*Cosmopolitan*, May, 1906) the probability of the whole plot is sacrificed to the effect of surprise, so that the story doubles back upon itself. Even though the end comes with a shock, it should seem on reflection to be a possible, even a natural, ending — that is, it must have been prepared for. Preparation is a fine art, requiring care and delicate workmanship, and leisure on the part of both writer and reader. We may question whether the art is not quietly passing out of existence.

The classical unities may be partially applied to short-story plot. We cannot place any definite time limit. We can say, however, that, the briefer

the period of time covered in actual narration, the more powerful the story will be. We cannot say there must be no gaps in the action of a story, but we can say that the gaps should be very few. The unity of place can be more strictly enforced. For a change of scene generally means an undesirable complexity of plot. The unity of action is the one indispensable unity of plot. The stories of Maupassant and Poe show the power of singleness of conception. Excellent studies in unity of time and place are: Stevenson's "Markheim," Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death," and Kipling's "Little Tobrah."

The method of short-story differs essentially from that of mere narrative in this: the story is conceived not as a mere continuous run of events, but in a few striking scenes, more or less closely joined. The lack of such dramatic crystallization into units of action often makes amateur work weak and ineffective. The main incidents do not stand out in relief, but all are buried under a muddy stream of narrative. From a study of the drama one can gain an idea of the completeness of scene that may be secured from suggestive treatment. He need not servilely imitate the methods of the drama; for there is no reason why he should not avail himself of the opportunity to use connecting narrative where he

needs it. But he can learn to conceive the action in a series of developing scenes or situations. These should be few in number, and such that one grows naturally out of the preceding and leads naturally into the next. Otherwise the connecting narrative will be a patchwork and a blemish.

In considering the mass of material, one of the most important problems is the location of the story in point of time. Most people are tempted to begin on a full scale too far back in the history of the story, instead of stationing themselves at a good central point, where the early beginnings can be seen in dim perspective as small as they really are for story purposes.

Then comes the problem of arrangement of events. In the simple story of incident, the question of method is correspondingly simple. The only rule that can be laid down is, that the action shall progress somewhat rapidly, without digression, toward a climax. Proportion is the main consideration. In most cases the main incident must be filled in with more detail. Or, if simplicity of climax seems more desirable, details may be introduced shortly before the climax for the sake of securing suspense. The question of method in this type of story involves nothing more than compression or expansion of the action.

But where there are several characters and the

action is complex and the motive becomes significant, the problem of arrangement appears. Several characters are in action at the same time; but only one person's actions can be given detailed representation at one point of time. From the nature of language it is difficult to place in single file events which occurred side by side. Fortunately, all that is necessary is to secure the effect of reality. The events need not, then, be related in the exact order of their occurrence. They must be so ordered that they shall seem to have occurred in their real chronological order.

Climax is not the only consideration in securing emphasis for the story which has any complexity of plot. Lights and shades must show in the delicately varying intensity of the action. The slow and quiet passages make effective background for the quick and thrilling crises of the action. It is hard to determine where to go slowly and where to hurry the action. But we are pretty well agreed that it is crude to narrate as Defoe did now and then, skimming an incident rapidly before narrating it in detail. Suspense is needful at some point in the story. But sometimes it is pleasing and sometimes it is exasperating to be teased by a suspense of interest. No rules can be laid down here. The answer is different for every story and every part of a story.

It is safe to say, however, that any climax of interest in a story should be marked by a quickening of action, and it may be prepared for by a slight retarding. The means of varying action are more or less mechanical. Action may be checked by using many words and including many details; by abundance of description and analysis; by introducing dialogue which does not carry forward the main line of incident. Action may be hastened by depending on suggestion rather than enumeration of details; by skilful selection and wise omission; by compressed, terse sentences and effective diction.

In leaving the general subject of plot for the details of mechanism, it must be confessed that all theoretical rules for making plots may prove, in practice, wooden. And inasmuch as the reason for plot is, to secure a greater interest in the theme, the writer is at perfect liberty to disregard all theories of plot if, by so doing, he can secure this increased interest.

CHAPTER V

MECHANISM

I. *The Beginning*

In so brief a piece of work as the short-story, the first impression and the last are of supreme importance, and there is little opportunity to redeem a bad beginning. Here the reader's taste must be consulted, rather than the author's ease. The story must begin where it has some interest, even if it would have been more convenient to begin somewhere else. An appreciation of the power of suggestive brevity has conspired together with the hurry of a busy age to shorten greatly the introduction to the story. Irving and Hawthorne and Poe indulged sometimes in elaborate and finely wrought paragraphs of introduction. These are instinctively shunned by clever writers of magazine fiction in our day. By the cutting down of introduction the short-story has gained in brevity, compression, and suggestive power; and it has acquired the ability to catch the reader's attention with a rush. Whether it has not lost something of great value in the pains-

taking setting of a background subtly harmonizing with the story motive or the story mood, is an open question. The fact remains, however, that the present day fashion says short introductions will be used.

A distinctively modern device for catching the attention quickly is that of beginning with a bit of conversation. This is a good plan, if the writer can then go *forward* with his narrative, giving the necessary preliminaries in retrospect through dialogue or simply through dramatic suggestion. But the device becomes a cheap trap for snaring the attention when the writer is compelled to proceed from a thrilling speech to a prosaic return. The reader has a right to feel indignant or amused at the author who gives him a remark or two of startling interest, informs him that Philip Leighton, the speaker, stood on the bank of the Olentangy with a loaded revolver in his hand, and leaves him in that perilous position while he goes on to tell how Philip Leighton's ancestors came over in the *Mayflower*. When a beginner has once turned off the main road of a story, he experiences infinite difficulty in getting back. Sometimes he is reduced to the bald expedient of retracing his steps to the cross-roads and starting off in a new direction: "And it is this same Charles that we find Elizabeth inquiring about this Sunday morning." This sentence is sufficient in itself to indicate that

the story was begun at the wrong point, and that the author then tried to proceed both ways at once. That a conversational beginning near the heart of the story can successfully suggest the situation, without these false starts and returns, is proved by such stories as Kipling's "Story of the Gadsbys," Hope's "Dolly Dialogues," and Ollivant's "The Lord, and the Lady's Glove."[1] But it takes considerable practice in writing to acquire the knack of introducing necessary explanation or implying it by dialogue, without clogging the action of the story.

The tendency toward realism is partly responsible for the modern habit of beginning in the thick of the story. Zola starts well along in the story, with a scene of energy, hurry, and excitement. He gives a brisk announcement of the place and the time of day, and then whirls rapidly into the story. It is more logical and more orderly to begin as far back as is necessary to give the preconditions of the story; but it is more natural and more convincing to strike quickly into the middle of the story. For, in real life, it is often so that we are plunged into contact with an interesting situation. And it is so that we come to learn one another's history. Such a practice also does away with the possibility of the wholly needless, unprogressive introductions which merely

[1] *McClure's*, February, 1902.

serve the writer as a means for getting up his steam. Such an introduction as this merely marks time: —

"While I was a student at the university, things happened which will never fade from my memory. But more lasting than all the others are the recollections of my senior year."

The beginner is often tempted to include within the story a train of moralizing which may have preceded the conception of the story in his own mind as a preliminary mental process. Possibly he hopes to give the keynote thus. It is doubtful whether an unknown author could strike an editor or even an uncritical reader through such a beginning as Kipling's in "Three and — an Extra": —

"After marriage arrives a reaction, sometimes a big, sometimes a little one; but it comes sooner or later, and must be tided over by both parties if they desire the rest of their lives to go with the current." He uses the same sort of introduction in "Thrown Away": —

"To rear a boy under what parents call the 'sheltered-life system' is, if the boy must go into the world and fend for himself, not wise."

Amateurs dare not mimic this device. Kipling knew he was indulging in a mannerism, and more than once he deliberately calls attention to his little text, as in "The Conversion of Aurelian McGoggin":

"This is not a tale exactly. It is a Tract; and I am immensely proud of it. Making a Tract is a Feat." But it is only the extraordinary writer who can juggle with all the laws of composition and then come off triumphant. The ordinary writer who should produce a tract in the guise of fiction, even without frank mention of the fact in starting, would be in danger of losing his readers as soon as they had sniffed his purpose. A safe rule for the beginner is, that the expository beginning, whether it be moralizing or mere generalizing, should be avoided, and that the introduction should comprise only true narrative material.

In the chapter on Setting, it will be shown that long descriptions of scenery are undesirable unless the scenery is vitally important for the story. Set descriptions of characters at the beginning become unattractive just as soon as they grow lengthy. Remembering the modern taste for brevity, the wise writer will dispense as much as possible with pure description as well as pure explanation, and proceed at once with narrative.

The normal introduction to a story may contain indication of the time, the place, the preliminary events which are essential to the understanding of the situation; or, it may comprise names, descriptions, traits and relationships of characters — any or all of

these in combination. These basal facts which must be given somehow are true narrative material, though they draw on description and exposition for assistance.

These facts must not be baldly listed, but must be given in a concise and interesting way. They should seem to come in easily and gracefully How painfully awkward is this amateurish stage-bow: "My brother and I were returning home late one July day when the following little adventure happened."

A pompous beginning is no less repellent to the average reader than the awkward efforts of the amateur. A short-story which began in anything like the manner of James's "The Tragic Muse" would probably not be widely read. A novel has some chance to redeem itself after a beginning of this sort: —

"The people of England have made it no secret that those of England, as a general thing, are, to their perception, an inexpressive and speechless race, unaddicted to modifying the bareness of juxtaposition by verbal or other concessions." A novel might even survive the following initial description of its characters: —

"No particular tension of the visual sense would have been required to embrace the characters of the

four persons in question. As a solicitation of the eye on definite grounds, they too constituted a successful plastic fact." But the beginning of a short-story should be unmistakably clear and simple, charged with a definite, even obvious meaning, and promising an interesting story.

The most common drawback to the introduction is dulness. This beginning is neither good nor bad in itself, but worthless for the story because it is essentially commonplace and uninviting: —

"It was late one afternoon in November when Grace Marsh alighted from the train at Bellview station. She was a teacher in the school at Woodton, and a few days' vacation had given her the chance to make an unexpected visit to her aunt's country home."

A study of Poe's beginnings will show that the introductory paragraph may give so much information as is absolutely necessary, not only without dulness, but in such a way as to set the story tone and draw the reader into the situation with the rapidity of thought. In "The Pit and the Pendulum" the mood is struck at once, and many of the necessary preliminaries implied in the single word *inquisitorial*: —

"I was sick, sick unto death, with that long agony, and when they at length unbound me and I was

permitted to sit, I felt that my senses were leaving me. The sentence, the dread sentence of death, was the last of distinct accentuation which reached my ears. After that, the sound of the inquisitorial voices merged in one dreamy, indeterminate hum."

An extraordinary beginning, but furnishing excellent preparation for a fantastic story, is that of "The Black Cat": —

"For the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen, I neither expect nor solicit belief. Mad indeed would I be to expect it in a case where my very senses reject their own evidence. Yet mad am I not, and very surely do I not dream. But to-morrow I die, and to-day I would unburden my soul."

We have in "The Tell-Tale Heart" a similar preparation, but rather a finer one, inasmuch as it subtly but certainly suggests the one essential fact of the tale — the narrator gone mad through conscience: —

"True! nervous, very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses, not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and the earth. I heard many things in hell. How then am I mad?

Hearken! and observe how healthily, how calmly, I can tell you the whole story."

Such a beginning is felt by the reader as an integral part of the story. This should be the effect of every introduction.

II. *The Point of View*

The form into which the narrative shall be cast would best be determined by the author's attitude toward his characters and his incidents. Save for humorous comment and for analytic rendering of a mood, the first person narrative is preëminently awkward. The amateur who uses it stands in danger of giving the impression that he is continually blundering out in front of his camera: so that the result is a patch of a story marred here and there by a grotesque enlargement of some portion of his own anatomy. Unless one is writing a story of humorous intent or endeavoring to dissect a mood, he is bound to experience difficulty in making the first person narrator of any interest without making him seem egotistic. In a dialogue, if one reports himself as saying a good or clever thing, it looks egotistic; and if he goes to the other extreme, the narrative grows dull. And it is almost impossible to describe one's self successfully. To be sure, the heroine of a story

in a newspaper introduces herself in this way, "Men raved of my beauty." But the statement is hardly convincing — certainly it causes no thrill of sympathetic admiration. Only a person gifted with such thorough self-confidence that he can enjoy the process of self-revelation as much as he expects the reader to, can make much headway with it. Clara Morris seems to get genuine enjoyment out of reminiscent sketches running in *McClure's* (spring of 1906); but still she finds it necessary, when recounting incidents flattering to herself, to hustle the narrative abruptly into another form, saying to a bystander, "Here, you speak these lines."

Aside from the conflict with the author's modesty, the first person narrative presents mechanical difficulties. There is the constant temptation to get outside the narrative and see how one is looking in a certain situation: "The dog broke loose and came running after me. I screamed and ran, frightened until I was as white as a sheet."

In the story of adventure, the first person narrative may become quite vivid, but it precludes the idea of catastrophe and hence, in a measure, weakens the suspense. However, several stories have been printed whose authors did not seem to be embarrassed in the least by the fact that the first person narrator died within the story. And a college

student finished off his first tragic story with the astonishing conclusion, "With one heart-rending groan I sank to the ground and knew no more."

The same violation of point of view may, of course, occur in the third person narrative, but a blunder like the following, taken from a newspaper account, is indeed a rarity: —

"The night before he was to sail *he was awakened by a choking sensation and, grasping what was coiled about his neck, tore it away and threw it to the other side of the room.* The next morning a servant went to awaken him and found his dead body terribly swollen. He had been bitten on the hand by one of the most deadly snakes in India." The author of this tale was indeed omniscient.

The letter form of story must be exceedingly clever to be successful. Aldrich's "Marjorie Daw" is as good as any story written in this form. The letters are concentrated upon a single theme and are therefore brief and pointed. When Richardson invented the form in order that Clarissa Harlowe might pour out her heart, he showed at once its good points and its bad. It is admirably adapted for self-analysis and confessions of all sorts; but it is in danger of being spun out to too great length. "Clarissa Harlowe" is too long, even for a novel in an age of leisure, because it is too long for the probabilities.

Clarissa must have written some two thousand words an hour for eight hours a day, to keep up with the events listed in her letters. The modern reader has become so very critical that he notes these little inconsistencies of narrative.

The diary is generally more interesting to its keeper than to the public; and the small field of the diary story has been pretty well worked over. The crying sin of the diary story is its almost inevitable sentimentalism. Mary Adams's "The Confessions of a Wife," [1] a serial story, draws out to great length the portrayal of the somewhat morbid moods of a very moody individual. And the diary story which is not a relief map of the emotional realm is likely to be flat, diffuse, and dull.

Since the time of Fielding, the third person narrative has been the predominant form of fiction. The author who tells the story should not, as a rule, enter into the narrative in his own person. For the brevity of the short-story will permit little comment, and unity of impression will be sacrificed if the author insists on jumping into the middle of a scene or even too apparently managing his stage. Such behavior not only distracts the attention to an individuality outside the tale, but it frequently destroys the illusion of reality. The author may, however,

[1] *Century* (spring of 1902).

as impersonal narrator, be omniscient and omnipresent, reading for us the inmost motives of his creatures.

A character within the story may be made to do the talking, without any sacrifice of interest. Narration within narration, however, is not good story art. The character who is to reel off a yarn should not be so presented that the introduction is in danger of being mistaken for one of two main story lines. Kipling's "Soldiers Three" is an example of a successful use of this device.

III. *The Details of Mechanism*

Attention has already been called to the necessity of a careful location of the story in point of time. Since the short-story is conceived as a series of nicely graded scenes or stages leading to a climax, — a series which is only artificially isolated from what is before and after, — a failure to cope with the plot problem of time-location will land the author in serious difficulties in the practical working out of the plot. It is the merit of the short-story that it can achieve a powerful impression of unity if just the right cut be made in the line of action. The right cut is pretty near the main incident, before and after. The main incident may thus be expanded,

narrated on full scale as it deserves, and the preliminary action reaching back into the commonplaces of experience will seem to be diminishing in perspective. This artificial proportion acquired by foreshortening is one of the main mechanical distinctions between short-story proper and mere narrative. The beginning and the ending of a student's theme will show the havoc that can be wrought in narrative material by a failure to locate the beginning and the ending of an incident: —

AUNT PATTY

"Aunt Patty is a typical old maid. Bad luck, as many people call it, has followed her all her life. Death and financial troubles have deprived her of a home, except that provided by her friends and distant relatives. We shall go with her as she spends a few weeks at one of the homes in which she is made welcome.

"'Oh, papa, Aunt Patty is comin' to-day,' said little three-year-old Mary one morning at breakfast."

Unquestionably this story would have gained vigor, as well as something of unity of effect by beginning with the child's speech. After a series of incidents, in which Aunt Patty proves thoroughly obnoxious to the adults, and culminating in a family

quarrel, the conclusion rounds up with the beginning in unique circular procedure: —

"Poor Aunt Patty! She tries to be pleasant, but she was spoiled when a little child, and was never taught how to be considerate of other people's rights and feelings. Her better nature appeals very strongly to little children, who are not able to understand or appreciate her deficiencies. Her kind words and friendly interest had made an impression on Mary's mind: hence her delight when she heard that Aunt Patty was coming."

It takes experience to teach a writer that he may boldly cut his goods close and leave the edges raw, without ornamental bindings or wrought fringes at the ends.

Another practical question of mechanism concerns the indication of the division of the action into scenes or stages. Theoretically, this is undesirable, since the short-story is able to be conceived as a perfect unit, whose scenes are so graded that the imagination leaps over the gaps without effort. But, as a matter of fact, a number of powerfully dramatic stories have been written, where the stages were marked by division into parts or chapters, indicated by numbers or double lines. Possibly these stories succeed in spite of, rather than because of, this artificial device for calling attention to the plot con-

struction. And it is to be remembered that such marked division is desirable only when the imagination of the author has crystallized the action into stages as capable of isolation as are the scenes of a drama.[1] The use of double lines or rows of asterisks to indicate the flight of time is a mere amateurish makeshift. Time-gaps should be calmly ignored, if possible, or frankly recognized and bridged over as a matter of course. Under no circumstances should an author put up a row of barbed-wire fences (* * *), shutting off the road ahead. The short-story, if properly located, does not often need to cover long periods of time. And where it does, the indication can be made in a variety of ways so that the gaps are neither conspicuous nor monotonous. In "The Great Stone Face," Hawthorne meets this problem: "The years went on, and Ernest ceased to be a boy. . . . More years sped swiftly and tranquilly away. . . . The years hurried onward, treading in their haste on one another's heels."

Here the author calmly steps over the yawning chasm, and the reader follows easily, and no red lanterns are hung out to emphasize the difficulty of the feat.

[1] Study the dramatic construction of Kipling's "Baa-Baa Black Sheep" and of Virginia Boyle's "Black Silas," *Century*, January, 1900.

The whole problem of transition is important for the story. This is a question of style, to be solved only through long practice guided by the rhetorical principles of variety and ease. Even Goethe lacked smoothness of transition : "Wilhelm retired to his room and indulged in the following reflections." And the beginner's work is often marred by stiff introductions of new material such as this, "Later she finds these thoughts running through her mind, Do I forget my vows?"

The continuity and unbroken movement of the story are of great importance. Movement is interrupted and reversed because the writer has never straightened out his material into its location in point of time. Before pen is put to paper, the whole movement should be mentally arranged. Then there will be no necessity for such overlapping narrative as the following: —

"Saturday morning dawned bright and clear. The three boys had arisen early and, after a short consultation, had decided to ask Frank to join them in their sports again. But soon after they set out for his house, they saw him leave and strike out for the woods that bordered on the lake.

"'Wonder what he's up to!' muttered Ned. 'Can't be goin' fishin'; for he hasn't any pole. Wonder what he's got in that basket.'

"'Oh, come on; we can get along without him. I say, fellows, let's make the wigwam first. Then we can go on the war-path, and I'll bet we'll trail him.'

"In a few hours the boys had constructed a wigwam woven of pau-pau leaves and branches.

"*But what of Frank? As he walked home alone Friday evening*, he busily devised plans for triumphing over the other boys."

The continuity of a story may be broken by the intrusion of extraneous matter requiring a backward step to resume connections: —

"The idiot had probably slept in concealment until one o'clock and then had crept round and round the room, seeking, in his blind, animal way, some means of escape. He had always been harmless; *and the terrible neglected condition of the poor creature brought about a reform in the Nelson County poorhouse.*

"*And what of the poor girl who had been a victim to this awful night of horror?*"

The various devices for heightening suspense and preparing for the climax are, like the methods of transition, partly questions of style. Yet they have also structural significance. A love story, for example, falls down flat if the sentiment is in no way prepared for.

"Next evening, when Mary Collins was down

street, she saw John McIntyre drive into town. 'Did you bring me those apples, Mr. McIntyre?' she asked. 'Oh, aren't they beauties! How I'd like to see the orchard where they grew!'

"'It isn't far out there, Miss Collins, and I'd be glad to give you a ride, as I'm going home at once!'

"And so it was that John McIntyre fell in love with sweet Mary Collins."

In John Luther Long's "The Siren,"[1] a story worth study for its artificial but clever mechanism, the movement is like that of a dream, where the unexpected is the natural and the convincing. But the tragic outcome is nevertheless prepared for by the recurrence of the refrain, the "too late" of the Siren's eyes.

Preparation for *dénouement* does not mean warning signals. It is irritating to be nudged with a premonition by an unskilful writer.

"Our readers will discover by and by why we are so particular in referring to this latter piece of furniture."

"All this sounded very charming, but oh, if we could only have had a glimpse into the few eventful days we were to spend there, how much trouble and misery we might have avoided!"

[1] *Century*, July, 1903.

Such signals are not to be compared with Hawthorne's delicate preparation in "The Ambitious Guest" or with the tragic hint in "The Birthmark," where Aylmer dreams and mutters, "It is in her heart now; we must have it out."

Suspense is, of course, desirable in the short-story, as in all fiction; but it cannot be accumulated, and it is not in any sense necessary to the success of story plots. Maupassant's "A Piece of String" and, in fact, most of the realistic stories of our day proceed almost entirely without suspense. It is to be remembered, too, that, even though the end may be known in advance, the highest kind of suspense may be maintained by a gradual revelation of the way toward that end. And preparation for *dénouement*, if skilful, is likely to heighten rather than lower the suspense. Moreover, it is by these subtle touches of preparation that the conclusion of a story is made to seem to the reader the one inevitable conclusion.

IV. *The Ending*

The ending of a story includes climax and conclusion. The climax is the main point of the story, at which the lines of interest rise to their greatest height of emotional power and converge. "The conclusion is the solving of all problems, the termination

of the narrative itself, and the artistic severing of all relations between narrator and reader."[1] The conclusion is of considerable importance for the structure of the drama and the novel: in the former, for toning down the emotional strain as well as making clear the plot; in the latter, for clearing up complexities of plot and making some necessary disposals of the minor characters. But the short-story, having simple plot construction, should not stand in need of explanatory after-statements. The normal story-plot has climax and conclusion so close as to be almost if not quite identical. In the story of ingenious plot, however, the story may need to be continued after the height of suspense has been passed over. Thus, in Poe's "The Gold-Bug," after the exciting climax is passed, there follows immediately a sort of natural rest and relaxation. But the interest of the reader is not lost: it simply gives way to a more intellectual interest in the careful working out of the mysterious cipher which constitutes the ingenuity and hence the whole point of the plot. The first climax, the finding of the treasure, is, without question, the more stirring; but the suspense is by it relaxed and not released until the final resolution of the mystery.

Poe's customary practice was a lightning-like

[1] Barrett, "Short-Story Writing," p. 171.

conclusion. "The Pit and the Pendulum" is very long-drawn-out; but in sharp contrast with the expansive body of the narrative comes this brief conclusion: —

"I struggled no more, but the agony of my soul found vent in one long, loud, and final scream of despair. I felt that I tottered upon the brink — I averted my eyes —

"There was a discordant hum of human voices! There was a loud blast as of many trumpets! There was a harsh grating as of a thousand thunders! The fiery walls rushed back! An outstretched hand caught my own as I fell fainting into the abyss. It was that of General Lassalle. The French army had entered Toledo. The Inquisition was in the hands of its enemies."

No one has been more successful than Poe in writing stories that must be remembered — indelible impressions on the imagination. This is due in part to the rapidity and intensity of his conclusions. Though he delights in stories of mood or conscience, it is significant that he nearly always makes them end in action. His practice may be illustrated fairly by "The Black Cat," where in four short sentences the climax is reached, the last of which gives, in a tone of concentrated horror, the essential fact of the plot: —

"Of my own thoughts it is folly to speak. Swooning, I staggered to the opposite wall. For one instant the party upon the stairs remained motionless, through extremity of terror and of awe. In the next a dozen stout arms were toiling at the wall. It fell bodily. The corpse, already greatly decayed and clotted with gore, stood erect before the eyes of the spectators. Upon its head, with red extended mouth and solitary eye of fire, sat the hideous beast whose craft had seduced me into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman. *I had walled the monster up within the tomb!*"

Simplicity, as well as brevity, contributes to the intensity of the conclusion. It is the simplicity of the ending of Maupassant's "*Une Vendetta*" that makes it doubly terrible. And, again, the power of the simple ending may be seen in such stories as Coppée's "The Substitute" and "The Captain's Vices."

The short-story conclusion should not be descriptive, nor should it be expository, whether for purposes of psychological analysis, moralizing, or clearing away plot problems. Rather, it should be made of typical narrative material, preferably a decision or an act narrated by the author or suggested by the speech of the characters.

It is a debatable question whether the ending must

really conclude. Some plots have for their whole point the posing of a problem. It may be a minor problem provoking curiosity only (Stockton's "The Lady or the Tiger?" *Century*, 25:83, does little more than this); or it may be a problem of conduct, involving ethical standards (Hamlin Garland's "A Branch Road"). It would seem that, if a problem is worth solving at all, it would be allowable to pose it and leave it with the reader. But this practice is not synonymous with the false climax and abrupt ending used by amateurs who are endeavoring to secure the brevity and suggestiveness now so much desired. A student left his boy heroes stuck on a sand-bar, and gave not the slightest clew to their subsequent fate. Another left the pitcher chasing a rowdy round and round the ball field for a fight. Such conclusions are uncomfortably suggestive of characters petrified in action. The story should conclude unless there is special reason why it must not. But it should not be carried far past the climax and smoothed down into dulness and conventionality. "And so they were married and lived happily ever after" has gone out of date; but the practice still survives in endings such as these: —

"Indeed, the whole family were delighted to have Robert in their home, and he never forgot the debt of gratitude he owed to them."

"John Guthrie never regretted the stand he took; for the negro boy did not disappoint his expectations."

When the main incident has been given, the story should be terminated with all due speed, that the last impression may be interesting and strong.

It has often been stated that editors glance first at the beginning and then at the ending, before reading through a story manuscript. If so, they are doubtless saved many weary hours of reading stories which are crude and pointless. Faults of style are likely to appear at their worst in the introductory paragraph, and lack of point and plot comes out inevitably in the conclusion. One would need only the closing paragraph of this theme to convince him that absolutely nothing has happened in it, and that the story was concluded before it had properly begun: —

"They had barely gotten under shelter when the storm burst forth. 'What a shame that our trip should be spoiled in this way!' said the boys. 'Yes, it is too bad,' remarked the girls, 'but we'll go again to-morrow.' 'Yes, that's what we will,' replied the boys, 'and we'll prepare for the rain, too.'"

Another pointless story closes with the discovery that *her* mother knew *his*. They chatted like old friends, the writer says.

"As Mary rose to go, she said 'Good-by,' and added: 'You must certainly come to see us. Mother will be so glad to meet you.'"

The conventional ending should be avoided like a plague. And an ending should be sought for which will unmistakably indicate that progress has been made.

CHAPTER VI

UNITY OF IMPRESSION

It has been said that the short-story requires absolute unity of plot. But with unity of plot and a good central idea a writer may still fall short of the highest unity — the unity of impression, which depends upon the story's *tone*. Unity of conception is a prerequisite to the impressionistic effect, but unity of execution must be added to it. This calls for every resource of style.

A careful comparison of the best works of such writers as Poe, Hawthorne, Maupassant, Coppée, Daudet, and Kipling with the average readable story printed in the magazines to-day, will show that it is the lack of a definite and unified emotional coloring (resulting in a harmony of atmosphere) that brands the latter as hopelessly second class. This delicate harmony of tone is very difficult to acquire, but it is well worth striving after; for it is a mark of fine art and indicates masterly conception.

It is true that many stories do start out in one

mood or tone and end in another. But the story which is a rounded, polished unit has its tone and temper the same throughout. If the story begins well, it ends well, and if it begins badly, it ends badly — that is, unless the author has deliberately undertaken the effect of contrast, as in "The Ambitious Guest," where the cheerful picture of home life serves as dramatic contrast for the impending tragedy. As a rule, the comic or even cheerful beginning is bad art for a tragedy.

The first essential for unity of impression is singleness of purpose, resulting in simplicity of plot. The end must not only be foreseen from the beginning: it must dominate the whole progress of the story.

"The *dénouement* of a long story is nothing, it is just a full close, which you may approach and accompany as you please — it is a coda, not an essential member of the rhythm; but the body and end of a short-story is bone of the bone and blood of the blood of the beginning." [1]

Poe, too, testifies to the necessity of strict unity of impression: —

"A skilful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived, with

[1] Stevenson, "Vailima Letters," 1: 147.

deliberate care, a certain unique or single effect to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents, he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tend not to the out-bringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one preëstablished design."

And he observes the law, *par excellence*, in his "Fall of the House of Usher." The keynote of the story, so far as mood is concerned, is sounded in the introductory paragraph and again in the last paragraph, in a very similar way, so that the mood of the story is the reader's first and his last impression. There is in this story also such a choice of setting as can come only from a vivid conception of the story motive. The landscape is absolutely harmonious with the idea and is indeed the instrument for conveying the emotional atmosphere.

Perhaps one of the main reasons why amateurs fail to secure such unity is, that they are unwilling to give up certain points which pride of creation persuades them are not thoroughly irrelevant, but which really occurred to them accidentally and are aside from the purpose of the story. Details which are not quite relevant not only contribute nothing —

they positively detract from the impression of the story.

A more positive problem is, what to include. The selection of details which shall seem to be informed with one idea is the practical working out of the impressionistic motive.

A striking impressionistic device or two may be found in Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death." In the black chamber where the firelight streamed upon dark hangings, through blood-tinted panes, stood a gigantic clock of ebony, whose pendulum "swung to and fro with a dull, heavy, monotonous clang; and when the minute-hand made the circuit of the face, and the hour was to be stricken, there came from the brazen lungs of the clock a sound which was clear, and loud, and deep, and exceedingly musical, but of so peculiar a note and emphasis that, at each lapse of an hour, the musicians of the orchestra were constrained to pause momentarily in their performance to hearken to the sound; and thus the waltzers perforce ceased their evolutions, and there was a brief disconcert of the whole gay company, and while the chimes of the clock yet rang it was observed that the giddiest grew pale, and the more aged and sedate passed their hands over their brows as if in confused revery and meditation; but when the echoes had fully ceased, a light laughter at

once pervaded the assembly; the musicians looked at each other and smiled as if at their own nervousness and folly, and made whispering vows each to the other that the next chiming of the clock should produce in them no similar emotion, and then, after the lapse of sixty minutes, . . . there came yet another disconcert and tremulousness and meditation as before." The device is not dropped after this elaborate presentation. The Red Death made his way to the shadow of the ebony clock, where the tragedy reaches its culmination. And "the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay."

The leading device may be delicately exaggerated, as in Hawthorne's "Rappaccini's Daughter," which is permeated by the rich, heavy perfume of the poisonous breath of Beatrice. Similarly, the gorgeous but forbidding purple flower suggests the complex atmosphere of sensuous beauty at once heightened and marred by the taint of the unnatural and unwholesome. By the symbolic relationship between Beatrice and the sister flower, the two devices are made one.

No one has surpassed Hawthorne in the art of casting a spell over the imagination by the skilful handling of a physical suggestion. In "The Birthmark," the emotional intensity varies delicately with the distinctness of the fairy hand.

That the impressionistic effect was deliberately preconceived with Hawthorne as with Poe, may be inferred from almost all of his elaborate notes of motives for short-stories, of which the following is an extreme example: —

"The scene of a story sketch to be laid within the light of a street-lantern; the time, when the lamp is near going out, and the catastrophe to be simultaneous with the last flickering gleam." [1]

The use of such a time scheme would certainly secure strict unity of action, and would also contribute largely to unity of impression.

In the following note, Hawthorne has harmonized every detail of an imaginary story with his main character, impressionistically conceived through a few striking traits: —

"The story of a man, cold and hard-hearted, and acknowledging no brotherhood with mankind. At his death they might try to dig him a grave, but at a little space beneath the ground, strike upon a rock, as if the earth refused to receive the unnatural son into her bosom. Then they would put him into an old sepulchre, where the coffins and corpses were all turned to dust, and so he would be alone. Then the body would petrify; and he, having died in some characteristic act or expression, would seem,

[1] "American Note-Book," 1 : 16.

through endless ages of death, to repel society as in life, and no one would be buried in that tomb forever." [1]

Now, while the analysis of literary effects into mechanical devices is always arbitrary and, in a sense, profitless (inasmuch as the imitation of a particular device would by no means insure the procuring of the same effect), yet the student can, by a study of the great stories, come to appreciate the harmony of atmosphere and tone which have made the short-story, in the hands of the masters, second only to the poem in its capability of perfection of form as corresponding to the mood and thought. And he will inevitably come to the conclusion that, whatever formal laws of construction may be violated, he must never let the tone of his story lapse from that of a sustained and solitary emotional mood.

[1] "American Note-Book," 1 : 12.

CHAPTER VII

THE TITLE

THE title has for its main function the advertising of the story to the reading public. Like other advertisements, it may or may not announce the genuine essence of the article. Its first business is to attract the reader's attention by the promise of an interesting story. As there are all kinds of good stories, so there are all kinds of good titles; and it is very difficult to say, without considering at least the type of story, what constitutes a good, and what a bad title. But the essential elements of a good title are gathered into a single sentence by Barrett, when he says, "A good title is apt, specific, attractive, new, and short." [1]

As magazines and stories multiply, the need of advertisement correspondingly increases. One who made a business of it could not read all the interesting stories now produced; he must select. Some will judge by the illustrations, and some by the frequency of passages of dialogue; but the intelligent

[1] "Short-Story Writing," p. 67.

chooser will generally pay some slight attention to the title of a story.

Perhaps the title is very fanciful, such as: The Girl Who Was; The Garden Behind the Moon; The Fox's Understudy; The Monkey that Never Was. If so, it merely suggests a story of fantasy, with not so much as a hint as to the kind. But if the title is not altogether fanciful, it should have connection with the story at some point. It need not be a genuine text like the title of an expository theme, but it should hint at the most essential feature of the story. In forming the title, not the whole plot, but the motive should be taken into consideration.

The title may be deduced from the main idea or theme of the story (Expiation, A Branch Road, The Revolt of "Mother," A Note of Scarlet, The Substitute, The Test); from the main character (A Coward, A Solitary, Black Silas, Colonel Starbottle for the Plaintiff, A Church Mouse, A Kitchen Colonel); from the main incident (A Young Man in a Hurry); from the main object (The Gold-Bug, The Purloined Letter, The Necklace, A Piece of String). Or, it may indicate the setting (A Mercury of the Foothills, Up the Coulée, Outcasts of Poker Flat). The specific fitness of a title to the particular phase of plot should be able to be recognized after the story has been read. The aptness a title may possess is

to be observed in the titles of many French writers, which are "little miracles of clever symbolism."

Because of the difference in people's tastes, it is hard to say just why a title pleases or displeases, why it interests or fails to interest. It is probably because of what it does or does not suggest — because of its associations. For a title is a hint, rather than a subject. Some titles are failures in themselves, either in conception or in form; but most poor titles are so because of a deficiency or a falseness of suggestion. The fact that a title is defective does not *prove* that a short-story is unworthy; it merely suggests that to the casual reader. And there are some defects of title which may be traced back directly to errors in the construction of the story. So that, inasmuch as the majority of amateur work is marred by weak, false, or ineffective titles, it is worth while to consider the most common faults in title-making, even though we should arrive at only negative conclusions. It is worth while even to be able to recognize the deficiency of such titles as these drawn from beginners' work in story-writing.

First, there is the title which is patterned after the news caption. Perhaps because a news item furnished the source of plot these titles were used for short-stories by college sophomores: —

Killed Girl Who Would Not Elope.

Rescued from Flames.
A Victim of Ohio Weather.
Intelligent Pet Saves Life of Girl Mistress.

The news caption is not improved by the additional flavor of an adjective claiming for the story a quality which should be left to the reader's judgment, as in —

An Exciting Experience.
A Miraculous Escape.

To be avoided also is the title of general form which either roughly indicates the type of story, as in the following: —

A Coincidence.
A Surprise.
A Story of Adventure.
A Bear Story.

or, like these, indicates the fact that the story is, after all, mere narrative: —

A Fishing Trip.
An Experience in the Rocky Mountains.
A Ramble for Specimens.
A Trip Abroad (two pages).
Our Summer at Podunc (two pages).
What Happened in a Day.

These titles suggest nothing more than an unas-

sorted and probably uninteresting list of events. They are faulty because of a radical deficiency of story-plot.

Worse than the mere narrative title is the descriptive title, such as A Snowstorm and A Visit to the Natural Bridge. And still more unacceptable are abstract titles appropriate for expository essays:—

Brains.
Heroism.
A Girl's Courage.
Youthful Valor.
Getting Even.
The Effect of Cigarettes.

Beginners often think that they must pack the whole contents of the story into a summarizing title:—

How Aunt Miranda Missed Her Train.
Why Mr. Brown Did Not Go to Church.
How a Feast Ended.
A Horrible Night Spent with a Robber.

Such an effort at summarizing results often in titles which are so long as to be unwieldy:—

The Introduction of Robert Dean to Ridge School District.

Katherine Ackermann's Vacation in the Rocky Mountains.

A Struggle for Life in the Currents of a Waterfall.

And the effort at total revelation sometimes brings it about that an ingenious plot whose whole point lies in the reversal or surprise at the end is given away at the start. The interest of the reader is likely to be forfeited on reading titles which disclose *dénouement:* —

The Mischief of a Limb (a ghost story).
Only a Lightning Rod (a ghost story).
Only a Cannon Cracker.
An Attempted Highway Robbery.
A Scare.

The essential error here is an effort at too close connection with the plot.

At the opposite extreme is the loose title with *and* or *or*. The Thief and the Song, and Bert and His Gambling Den are not objectionable in themselves, but they do look as if the writer had not been able to decide which element of the story should be emphasized. The double title connected by a conjunction which throws upon the reader the burden of selection is a frank confession of the author's inability. A popular "ten-cent library" offers the following variety of titles: —

At Any Cost, and a Modern Cinderella.
Two Fair Women; or, Which Loved Him Best?
Lady Castlemaine's Divorce; or, Put Asunder.

Hilda's Lover; or, The False Vow; or, Lady Hutton's Ward.

Diana's Discipline; or, Sunshine and Roses.

Her Mother's Sin; or, A Bright Wedding Day.

A consideration of the last two pairs will show that the author was doubtful about the tone, as well as the motive of the story; for the members of the pairs are decidedly incongruous in their suggestion.

The title which is weak in itself is a mere dull commonplace, sounding quiet and unprogressive: —

A City Home.

The Summer Club.

The Wedding Trip.

A Youthful Friendship.

Or the idea back of it has been used so often that the title itself is trite: —

A Will and a Way.

The Turning of the Tables.

For Better or Worse.

The Lost Jewels.

A Blessing in Disguise.

A Haunted House.

Triteness is not disguised by putting it into the form of a statement or thesis to be proved: —

No Such Word as Fail.

Love is Not the Only Blind Passion.
The Biter is Sometimes Bitten.
Love Will Have its Own Way.

A title may be faulty in its diction. The ugliest faults are extreme alliteration and harsh combinations of sound: —

A Student Solicitor's Sin.
The Deepening of Desolation.
Elizabeth's Elopement.

These are instances of mild alliteration, as compared with a title of the Reformation Era, printed in the *New York Times*, — Seven Sobs of a Sorrowful Soul in Sin; or, the Seven Penitential Psalms of the Princely Prophet David. But it is to be remembered that modern taste indicates that, in prose, alliteration must be carefully disguised if it is allowed to appear at all.

There can be no doubt as to the undesirability of such uneuphonious combinations as the following: —

A Fortunate Misfortune.
A Spectacular Wreck.
The Haste of Jack Hastings.
The Cat's Stratagem.

Because of its brevity, because of its advertising mission, and because it is what we unsuccessfully

endeavor to recall a story by, the title should be not only chosen with care, but exquisitely worded. Even the subtlest incongruities should be avoided. Bossie's Adventure, John Smith's Last Prowl, and Reginald McDodd's Coon Hunt have a suggestion of the paradoxical. "Bossie" is almost too mild for adventure of any sort; "John Smith" too placidly conventional for prowling; and "Reginald McDodd" a trifle too aristocratic for the coon hunt. It may be said, in passing, that the title which includes a name demands especial care, lest the interest in the name-character be sacrificed at the start. Few readers would be interested in What Jimmie Did, Tom's Story, or Jamie's Ambition.

Very frequently the title adequately suggests the story tone. For example, none but the sentimental reader would be likely to take up stories appearing under titles such as these: —

Won and Lost — Happiness.
Love that was Lost.
After Clouds, Sunshine.

And only the seeker after sensationalism would follow the lure of Trapped and Duped by a Convict, with their suggestiveness of the chapter headings in the "Wild West" stories.

That a consideration of the function of the story

title is of practical benefit to the amateur may be seen by comparing the titles appended here with those used for illustration within the chapter. The taste of a writer cannot be purified once for all in a week or a month. Nor can the unimaginative writer be immediately taught invention. But classes quickly take up the essentials of the story title and, after the subject has been discussed, form titles which are considerably more interesting and attractive, as well as suggestive of a story with a point: —

The Passing of Nobody's Darling.
In the Name of the Messiah.
The Cremation in 77th Street.
The Passenger in Lower Two.
Martha Wright, Bewitched.
The Man with the Blue Goggles.
The Corner of Destiny.
The "Tallow-pot" of No. 56.
The Girl with the Evil Eye.
The Slide at the Liberty Bell.
The Defender.
Madam.
The Whistling Corpse.
A Matrimonial Deal.
The Spider's Diamonds.
His Supreme Decision.
The Voice that Conquered.

Polly's Destruction of Eden.
The Crucifixion of Ruth Ellen.
Shorty's Private Car.[1]

[1] The titles listed here are from stories written by a small class very soon after the subject of titles was discussed.

CHAPTER VIII

CHARACTERIZATION

I. *The Materials*

In gathering materials for character portrayal in the short-story there is a special need of observation. The trained story-writer is on the alert for every manifestation of that which is not necessarily odd or eccentric or abnormal in human character, but still fresh, striking, or of such importance as to have acquired perennial interest to the human race. Traits and whims, actions and motives, mental crises, must be observed in so far as they have external manifestations; and, where these fail, the author's sympathetic intuition must read in what is lacking. And the office of interpretation must not be underestimated; for without the intuitive grasp of character which comes from a habit of thoughtful introspection and careful comparison of the external manifestations of character with some inner standard, the author is likely to fail in unifying his materials and in instilling the breath of life. A character compounded from observed details which the author

has never, even to himself, interpreted, would be at best a piece of soulless mechanism — no true creation. A good character, like a good story, has a *point*. This point is given by interpretation.

As has been hinted above, the introspective turn of mind is helpful in interpretation. If one habitually weighs his own motives, he is likely to be more capable of judging others fairly. An author should thoroughly understand himself, if he understand no other man. For he can then furnish his own model. Through his own experiences he learns to understand those of others. Whether his characters are good or bad, every author puts a good deal of himself into them all. Characters of widely differing types may be drawn from the same model. According to the author's own statement, George Eliot's Casaubon in "Middlemarch" and Grandcourt in "Daniel Deronda" were drawn from herself. A few traits and the formula for combination are already furnished every author in himself. For the rest of his matter, he may trust to observation, if he is careful to rework the gathered facts.

Real persons are difficult to copy as a whole. It has been done occasionally with success (notable success in the cases of David Harum and Mrs. Wiggs). But the author must be careful, in sketching from real life, to conceal identity by making

slight changes which do not affect the mainsprings of the character — changes in appearance, circumstances, etc. The real character is best used, however, only as a source of fresh and varied information as to the make-up of the human mind, and as a guide to probability in the total work of character creation.

II. *The Scope*

The special work of the short-story in character realization is concisely stated in James W. Linn's definition of the short-story as "the presentation, in a brief, dramatic form, of a turning-point in the life of a single character." The short-story has more in common with the drama than with the novel here. For, as Mr. Linn goes on to say, "The novel aims to show *growth* of character, with reaction of one character upon another. It portrays a certain period or the whole of life — but with the aim of portraying growth. The short-story has to do with *change* in character — the cross-road, rather than the main road travelled." [1] Because of its limitations of space, the short-story is compelled to use dramatic methods, showing the main character in the glare of the footlights for a brief space of time. Also, for

[1] Lectures on the Short-Story, University of Chicago.

the same reason, it must dispense with much of the setting of minor characters used to such good advantage by the novelist. It must present characters artificially isolated in all respects,—from family, from relatives, from past history, and from the distant future. The story gives but a brief glimpse of the life of a character, and is almost never biographical. Past and future history may be hinted at, but they must never be skimmed in bald summary or told outright. The necessary information will be given by the skilful author incidentally, and apparently without design, and often it will be implied by the dialogue.

There is nothing unconvincing in this method of acquainting the reader with the characters. On the other hand, it is extremely natural. We rarely meet people in real life who tell us all about themselves within the first half hour; and, if we do, we politely avoid further acquaintance with them. The first rule for successful presentation is, that the reader's conception of the characters shall grow. This is as true of the stationary character as of the developing one. The revelation, at least, should be increasingly effective to the climax.

Broadly speaking, there are two main kinds of characters: those which change, and those which do not change. The short-story, like the novel, may

sketch stationary characters; but, in doing so, it is at a special disadvantage. In the novel, with its array of minor incident, its fulness of description and analysis, its wealth of comment, we are drawn so intimately into the life of the main character that we appreciate small points in characterization. We do not demand an unusual character or even an unusual situation. We loiter contentedly in the realm of the commonplace. In the short-story, on the other hand, if we are denied the spice of character development, we demand something unique in the character which appears so briefly on the stage before us. A common man may interest us; but, to do so, he must be presented in a situation which in itself suffices to make his commonplaceness a thing worth noting. In the short-story which merely reveals a character that does not change, there must be something unique either in the character or in the situation.

The developing character is naturally more interesting in the story, as it is in real life. And the best short-story is that which presents not development in full length or in summary, but a stage or cross-section of development — the character at a *crisis*, about to be determined in one direction or the other. Many writers on the art of the short-story fondly insist that the change in character cannot be accomplished within the legitimate compass of the short-

story. It cannot be accomplished after the fashion of the novel; but development can be achieved by a modification of the methods of the drama (as in Kipling's "Baa-Baa Black Sheep," to take an extreme example). The problems of character development in the short-story are very similar to those met in drama. There is the same necessity for the elimination of minor incident, and for the selection of a few significant passages in the action, one of which shall be the climax, and all of which shall bring the main character into such prominence of speech and action as shall render him transparent to the gaze of the beholder. To effect this, plot must be made subservient to the work of characterization. The situation must be nicely adapted to display the author's conception of his hero.

Like the drama, the short-story seems to be artificial in its condensation and foreshortening of the lives of characters. Howells says:[1] "People always knew that character is not changed by a dream in a series of tableaux; that a ghost cannot do much towards reforming an inordinately selfish person; that a life cannot be turned white, like a head of hair, in a single night, by the most allegorical apparition; that want and sin and shame cannot be cured by kettles singing on the hob." But, by eliminating the

[1] "Criticism and Fiction," p. 179.

common and the minor incidents, great and significant ones are made more prominent. By the great incidents is meant not necessarily those which are in themselves tremendous, but those which are significant for the particular character in question. In some cases these are very trivial in themselves, but tremendous in their consequences.

A main situation is the first necessity for the separation of the action of a story so as to present stages in the development of the character. With relation to that, the minor situations or incidents must be chosen. Infinite skill would seem to be demanded to connect these artificially isolated stages of character development into continuous narrative. But this is just where the unimaginative writer misses it. He buries his main situations under a muddy stream of narrative. This is one mark of the amateur; and it is this that marks the greatest difference between narration and short-story proper.

The situations, if chosen carefully, will imply most of the connection. They should, however, be nicely graded,[1] so as to make possible to the imagination what we call coherence or consistency in character development.

[1] See chapter on Short-Story, Baldwin's "College Manual of Rhetoric."

III. *Methods of Presenting Character*

1. *Description*

Many a beginner in story-writing is contented with a name and a trait or two to fill the position of a character. A growing conception of the needs of filling this empty form with the semblance of substantial life is likely to lead him to the opposite extreme of too great fulness of portrayal. It is necessary that the author have in his own mind a full conception of the appearance of his characters, a vivid mental picture of them. But it is not necessary — indeed, it is often undesirable — that he should put this down on paper. When we are reading the life-story of a man, we want his appearance given us in full. But when we find a man of interest only in a special situation, a full catalogue of personal details is not so necessary. The most imaginative writers give a hint or two and leave the reader's imagination to complete the picture. In "The Man Who Would be King," observe how few details of appearance Kipling gives us; yet how quickly we are led to form our pictures of the characters. We can even form a vivid picture from a clever listing of *temperamental* traits, as in this little sketch of Stevenson's:[1] —

[1] "Weir of Hermiston," p. 7.

"She bore the name of the Rutherfords, but she was the daughter of their trembling wives. At the first she was not wholly without charm. Neighbors recalled in her, as a child, a strain of elfin wilfulness, gentle little mutinies, sad little gayeties, even a morning gleam of beauty that was not to be fulfilled. She withered in the growing and . . . came to her maturity depressed, and, as it were, defaced; no blood of life in her, no grasp or gayety; pious, anxious, tender, tearful, and incompetent."

The growing appreciation of the power of imaginative appeal by the selection of salient details and the careful search for an effective diction have combined to bring about a new form of art in character description. Instead of the set and completed description of personages as to external characteristics, we have their appearance presented in changing lights, so that our conception of the look and manner of a character grows on us gradually, instead of being definitely and consciously moulded at the start. Thus it never becomes absolutely fixed, but remains sufficiently variable to permit the illusion of life.

The exhaustive listing of details of personal appearance argues a lack of imagination in the author, and generally fails to rouse the imagination of the reader to activity. A study of the following catalogue description (from "A Chelsea House-

holder") will show how a face should not be described:—

"To begin, then, Muriel was tall, with a slight, erect figure, a quick step, and an air of youth and vigor which did the beholder good to look at. Her face was oval, as nearly oval, at least, as a face can be in which the chin is a good deal more pronounced than is usual in classic beauties. The cheeks were pale, paler than they had any business to be, judging by the rest of her physique, the most noticeable fact in point of coloring being that the eyes, hair, brows, and lashes were all of the same, or pretty nearly the same, color — a deep, dark brown, inclining to chestnut above the temples, from which the hair was brushed courageously back, so as to form a small knot at the back of the head. Her eyes — not, perhaps, by the way, a strikingly original trait in a heroine — were large and bright; indeed, brighter or pleasanter eyes have seldom looked out of a woman's face, their beauty consisting less in their size and color than in this very vividness and brightness, which seemed to shine out of the irises themselves. For all that, the face in repose was not exactly a bright one, or rather, the brightness came to it only by fits and starts, its prevailing expression being a somewhat sober one, a sobriety giving way, however, at a touch, and being replaced by a peculiarly sunshiny smile and glance."

The details listed here are so numerous, their qualifications so many and so unimportant, that to ask the reader to put them together into a human face is like asking him to work out a puzzle picture-map.

Descriptions of characters should not be elaborated in such a way that details are overdone and the impression given that the descriptions are there for their own sake, independently of their story value. A single impressionistic detail is crudely overemphasized in Norris's "The Pit" (p. 10): —

"And all this beauty of pallid face and brown eyes was crowned by, and sharply contrasted with, the intense black of her hair, abundant, thick, extremely heavy, continually coruscating with sombre, murky reflections, tragic, in a sense vaguely portentous — the *coiffure* of a heroine of romance, doomed to dark crises." It takes an abnormally vivid imagination to foresee a tragic doom in the way a woman wears her hair.

If details of personal appearance should be sparing, details of costume should be all the more so. Save for contributing to the effect of local color in historical romance or for portraying eccentricities of character, costume is of very slight importance for a story. To illustrate the lengths to which description of this sort is sometimes carried, let us consider

the descriptive passages of "The Queen of Far-Away":[1]—

"She was looking at him out of clear, dark eyes that brimmed with light and mischief. He noted that their pupils were of ebony and their irises of amber, that they were shaded by gold-tipped, dark lashes, and accented by slender brows outlining the arch of her ivory lids, and that they were set at a distance, maddeningly piquant, from a delicate, upturned nose. Her thin upper lip raised itself, on each side of the crease in its centre, into the two little red tips that actresses, in their make-up, always create or intensify. The lower lip, on the other hand, was distinctly full. When she smiled, as she did soon, it was vouchsafed to Carow to see that her mouth was precious with pearl. . . ."

"She wore a long pongee outer coat, with broad cuffs, and a series of three capes; it was buttoned to the very hem with big pearl buttons. From the brim of her black straw hat hung a cobweb film of veil to just below the tip of her nose, and above that, draped over the brim, a thicker, heavier veil. She carried, in one hand, a pongee parasol and in the other, which was bare, she held a glove. . . ."

"He glanced inquiringly at his companion. Her lips were still smiling, but a velvety pink flush

[1] *Everybody's*, May, 1904.

had crept to the soft hair-line that outlined wavily her low forehead and her pearly temples; it even dyed the cream of her soft, creased throat. . . ."

"Her color was receding by faint degrees. She smiled delicately and her coquettish lashes swept down, entirely obliterating the radiant eyes. . . ."

"How beautiful she was! How straight and elegant her lithe figure, swaying in the muffled folds of her long cloak. Her hair. The maze of its brightness where honey-color ran into gold and then both deepened gloriously into red, its distracting ripples, the big, soft bunch, like massy gold at her neck, the fine-spun ringlets that clustered about her little ears. And such eyes! The depths of amber and gold in their irises, surrounding pupils like ebony, their look of radiant mischief, the coquettish sweep of their gold-tipped lashes.

"He recalled the clear-cut, dewy corners of her lips, their luscious fulness, the two little red tips so distinctly outlined on each side of the crease in the upper lip, the line of pearl that her rippling laugh disclosed. The vision thrilled him. . . ."

"As before, she wore a long cloak, but this one was of heavy black satin, with cascades of lace. She wore on her head a huge fichu of soft, creamy, Spanish lace, but he could see that in her hair, built high into a marvel of waves and ripples, there were dying some

little creamy garden roses. Through the opening of her cloak, it could be seen that she was wearing a light evening dress. . . ."

"'Take off your cloak!' he said, imperiously. 'Let me look at you.'"

"As though yielding, half through coquetry, half against her will, she slipped the big-sleeved cloak off, and let it fall into a glistening heap at her feet She was wearing a cream-colored crêpe gown; there were billows of yellowish old-looking lace about the neck and sleeves. The corsage left bare a square of her delicate flesh, the sleeves uncovered bare triangles of her dazzling shoulders. There was a string of pearls about her throat.

"'Heavens, how lovely she is!' Carow thought. 'Put this on,' he said, inconsistently and almost roughly, 'you'll catch cold.' He held it and she slipped her arms back into the capacious sleeves. The service brought him very near to her. Carow suddenly lost his head and took her in his arms. A moment later he released her muttering a shame-faced apology. With careful precision she adjusted the yellow scarf of Spanish lace about her neck. . . ."

"She was dressed in a long, black gown, heavily sequined in black and silver. It left bare a rounded segment of her white neck and then it fell, moulding itself jealously to the lithe, elegant figure. Her

hair was knotted in a red-gold bunch on her white neck. She was a very pretty woman graciously close on thirty. . . ."

These are not all the passages of description, but they are sufficient to illustrate the emphasis on minute and somewhat fleshly details of physical appearance, and more particularly the exceedingly elaborate costuming of the heroine. The gold-tipped dark lashes and the honey-colored, gold, and red hair are sufficiently puzzling items, but the changes in costume fairly make one dizzy. Imagine the labor of the illustrator of this story endeavoring to follow out directions. The story happens to be clever and interesting as a whole, but this is because it has a plot sufficiently clever to hold attention in spite of overdone description.

2. *Analysis*

The special need of analysis in the short-story is in the exposition of a crisis in the life of the main character. Not all crises require analysis. Some pass simply and naturally into a decision which may be readily expressed by speech or action. Such is the decision in Hamlin Garland's "Under the Lion's Paw":—

"Butler shrank and quivered, expecting the blow;

stood, held hypnotized by the eyes of the man whom he had a moment before despised — a man transformed into an avenging demon. But in the deadly hush between the lift of the weapon and its fall there came a gush of faint, childish laughter, and then across the range of his vision, far away and dim, he saw the bright head of his baby girl, as, with the pretty tottering run of a two-year-old, she moved across the grass of the dooryard. His hand relaxed; the fork fell to the ground: his head lowered.

"'Make out y'r deed an' mor'gage, an' git off'n my land, an' don't ye never cross my line agin; if y' do, I'll kill ye.'"

But there are crises which are more complex, where the play of motives becomes important for an understanding of the character. Even the most objective writer — Kipling, for example — uses analysis for such presentation. George Eliot excells in this work. Most of us, when we begin to analyze, are tempted to carry it too far. It should be remembered that prolonged analysis kills all other interest, and analysis of any sort suspends the narrative interest proper. It should therefore be used sparingly, especially if it is not superlatively clever. The best use that can be made of analysis in the short-story is to select carefully those elements of character which are most

closely relevant to the main story situation, and to concentrate these elements upon the point at issue. Maupassant does this in "Moonlight," where the analysis is so very long as to seem at first reading disproportionate.

3. *The Dramatic Method: Speech and Action*

The genuine narrative method of portraying character is the dramatic one of making the characters talk and act. Description and exposition are valuable, but only as accessories. The narrative method is more lifelike and hence more convincing. The modern short-story makes a careful use of dialogue to suggest mental traits, and even moral ones. Mrs. Hauksbee talks herself into transparent clearness. So do many of George Eliot's characters. Although in real life deeds are more important indications of a person's character, in the world of fiction speech is fully as important, because it can be made to serve the author's purpose more subtly in revealing fine shades of thought and feeling. The play of emotion, the conflict of motives, all those complex inner processes which necessarily precede the more external expression of our character in action need to be suggested to the reader. And there is no better vehicle than the dialogue for carrying this information.

Action there should be in every story, or there will be no progress. If possible, there should be some important action. Small actions can, however, be made very significant of character, as may be seen from a study of the side lines of action in "The Man Who Would be King."

All of these methods of character portrayal may be combined to give the effect of impressionism. Traits selected with extreme care may be emphasized into something more than naturalness — this because the human mind tends normally to exaggerate that which it finds interesting or important for itself.

4. *The Final Interest in Character*

Not action, but motive gives the final interest in character. The character in fiction is rarely a photograph of an individual. Almost always it is the illustration of a motive or of a play of motives which normally results in character formation.

5. *The Subordination of Characters*

Inasmuch as the short-story has but a few characters, — and these, as has been said, artificially isolated from relatives and friends, — the problem of subordination of characters is not nearly so great as in

the novel. Yet many an amateur story suffers from a lack of emphasis on one main character. Good stories have been written containing two important characters, or even three; but they were good because the story was still seen from the point of view of one of these — and but one. Baldwin says:[1] "One of the first questions in considering the promise of any material is, Whose story it this for me? . . . No story emerges until the narrator is dominated by one [character]."

The events may be the same, but they change kaleidoscopically with every change in point of view. The main character having been chosen, the others should not be permitted to occupy the front of the stage.

6. *Recent Tendencies in Characterization*

The subordination of characters is now a rather more delicate piece of work in one respect than it has been hitherto. The types of hero and heroine have undergone a change. It is not usually through mere natural advantages, such as wealth, fame, beauty, physical perfections, etc., that the leading man and leading lady tower head and shoulders above the minor folk. The modern author has to

[1] "College Manual of Rhetoric," p. 142.

reckon with a taste which prefers the normal, if not the every-day, in characters to the abnormal and unique. The cheap society novel still fashions heroes and heroines from the more or less accidental accompaniments of character. The cheap short-story book still thrills the reader with its morbid, freakish heroes. But in the better class of fiction, the writers have achieved success in proving the real worth of character to lie in its naturalness and its interest. So that, while minor eccentricities of character are eagerly sought out and emphasized for the sake of individualizing the hero or heroine, the larger aberrations from the normal and the natural are shunned. The first standard of characterization to-day is that of lifelikeness. The best characters are those which, in the large, are seen to be true to the pattern of our human nature.

This growing realism in characterization is not so much in opposition to idealism as to romance. The ideal in human character will always be admired and sought after so long as there are worthy writers. But there is a noteworthy difference in the way of bringing out this ideal. We have come to realize that a very good man may have small weaknesses; in fact, most of the very good men we know are open to criticism on at least one point. The eminently natural way to picture such a man includes this flaw.

Indeed, to many readers, the flaw seems to be a practical test of the genuineness of the man, who is, for this one defect, none the less a hero. Again, in place of the ready-made, highly idealized embodiment of goodness and nobility, we find, more and more, character in the process of becoming — character tempted and tried. So much fiction has been written and read that the leading types of human character are fairly well understood and easily recognized by the reader. More interesting to-day than the exposition or even the dramatic revelation of a type is the picture of a struggle, the play of motives, the decision for or against. The crisis story is a distinctively modern piece of work, exquisitely fitted to the tastes and tendencies of twentieth-century fiction.

It is only natural that the period of youth or adolescence should be chosen as the richest field for story-writers. For it is then that the elements of character make new groupings. It is then that the person begins to know himself, to compare himself with others, to form judgments of character, of right and wrong; to determine upon his own place among the world of people, and to work out his conception of his function in society. It is then that the real problems of environment in relation to character appear. For these reasons, rather than for the

romantic charm of youth, the majority of interesting characters are rather young. Fortunately, there are some writers who have done for middle age and old age what every writer is willing to do for youth. Mary Wilkins Freeman has rather old heroes and heroines, for the most part, and they are by no means uninteresting. They hold their place in literature through a delicate idealization of the commonplace and the ordinary.

It cannot be hidden that there is a place for the man of humble birth, who has had no means,—no educational advantages, perhaps, — but who "gets there" just the same. The survival of the anecdote story of character shows that there is a demand to know about this type of man who succeeds, by toil, self-denial, and pluck, in winning his reward. *Success* is full of these "get-there" stories, published not for their literary merit, but for their practical value as exemplars.[1] The difference between the self-made hero in fiction and the hero of such anecdotes lies chiefly in the necessity of making the former plausible and real. Then, too, the victory over mere external circumstances, however satisfactory from a practical point of view, is not the highest victory for character formation. External conditions have been seen not

[1] A really literary story of this type is Gouverneur Morris's "Simon L'Ouvrier," *Collier's Weekly*, Aug. 25, 1906.

to have a compelling power over character and life. Inner conflicts have assumed greater importance and greater interest. The modern hero has something worse to fight than an evil world and selfish men — he has the evil motives of his own heart arrayed against him. The stage of action in the story of character is not always the great world of events: more often the real stage is behind the scenes. The great hero in fiction is no mere type, no trait personified, no automaton predestined to go through certain movements to a certain goal, but a whole person, real and live; not wholly good and not wholly bad; complex, doubtful, problematic; struggling, tempted, even sinning, it may be, — but on the whole and in the end, conquering, — a character interesting from start to finish in the process of becoming.

The heroine, like the hero, has descended from the lofty pinnacle where she was stationed by romanticism, and now frequents the common walks of life. The beautiful, clinging, swooning, weeping, blushing, hysterical young woman who has worn the halo of romance through many centuries has been exterminated by a process very like natural selection and survival of the fittest. The American heroine of to-day is reasonably healthy, — perhaps even athletic, — and she does not hesitate to go where her brothers go and do pretty much the same things that they do.

She has suffered a notable expansion (averagely speaking) of waist measure as well as brain; and, with the establishment of a standard of good health and common sense, has had to forego the time-honored code of actions mapped out for her by romanticists of old. Where the eighteenth-century heroine would weep or faint or have hysterics, the twentieth-century heroine calmly masters the situation. In short, woman's character in fiction has lost, to some extent, that intangible atmosphere of romance and idealization; it has lost many of the external manifestations of beauty, and possibly something of delicacy; but it has gained vastly in strength, in individuality, and hence in the true inwardness of beauty — nobility of character.

7. *The Names of Characters*

In an article on story-telling,[1] James Payn says: —

"It is better for his own reputation that a writer risk a few actions for libel on account of unfortunate coincidences than that he should adopt the melancholy device of using asterisks or blanks. With the minor novelists of a half century ago, it was quite common to introduce the characters as Mr. A. and Mr. B., and very difficult the readers found it to

[1] *Living Age*, 146 : 412.

interest themselves in the fortunes and misfortunes of an initial. . . .

"'The elder and taller was the fascinating Lord B.; the younger, the beautiful Patty G., the cobbler's daughter.'"

There should be names for all the characters. Most of the names, and certainly those of the chief characters, should be highly individual. A hero does not star well, as a rule, under the name of Smith or Jones. The commonplace name is undesirable for the main characters, at least.

A name should not be incongruous in its suggestion with the conception of the character. For example, a *Jack* does not commit suicide convincingly. The name could be made to give a subtle suggestion of the character, so that, after reading the story, it is seen to be eminently appropriate. Such a name is that of Sir Willoughby Patterne in Meredith's "The Egoist"; and such is Gabriel Oake. In introducing a "mother's boy" in "The Pelican," Edith Wharton says, "His name was Launcelot [Amyot], and he looked it." The very fanciful name should be avoided, unless it is used purposely for comical effect; so also should names which offend by harsh combinations of sounds and names which do not seem to belong together. An effort should be made to secure a variety of names. It

was sheer poverty of invention that led an author to put in one story three towns named respectively Melville, Belville, and Bellview, and another to name two leading characters Anville and Orville. Within these restrictions, there is still wide liberty in the choice of names for purposes of fiction.

The names should be introduced into the story naturally and easily, not apologetically or conspicuously, as if it were remarkable that the fictitious character should own a name. And the reader should be made to believe that the names are real.

"The controversy was closed by a bet between Tom and his guest, whom we may call Earl."

"Grace — for that was her name — sat down on the veranda." Such a manifestly tacked-on name is better than a blank or an initial; but it is not thoroughly convincing.

CHAPTER IX

DIALOGUE

DIALOGUE has been defined as "composition which produces the effect of human talk — as nearly as possible the effect of conversation which is overheard." [1]

The first requisite for good dialogue appears in this definition. The talk in a story should seem to be actual human talk which has really taken place. It must not be merely possible; it must be convincing.

This suggests the second requirement. In order that the talk shall be convincing, it must be appropriate to the character who is made to utter it. It must be individual. No conversation can give the impression of reality, if the characters have been endowed by the author with a common habit or manner of speech. The importance of individual forms of speech for characterization can hardly be overemphasized, inasmuch as this, more than any other one thing, marks the difference between live creations and automatic wooden talking-pieces.

The speech of a person should, of course, vary with

[1] Bates, "Talks on Writing English," series 2, p. 213.

the changing situations in which he is placed, with any marked development in his thought-life, and with the changing emotions which are supposed to stir him. But it must not lose character. It must be continuously consistent — recognizable throughout the story as the speech of one particular character, suitable to him and to him alone. This applies literally to all the important characters of the story, and to such of the minor ones as are drawn with any definiteness. There are, of course, in many stories, plot-ridden, insignificant personalities which in some way serve the action, but which do not seem to deserve or need the added prominence of an individual form of speech. If it is a part of the author's purpose to keep these characters shadowy and indistinct, he refrains with reason from individualizing their remarks. The rule holds good, however, that for strong, distinct characterization, a special habit or manner of thought and speech is as essential for story purposes as a special habit of action. To go to the novel for an example, mark the fine shades of difference between Maggie Tulliver's aunts, as brought out in the various scenes where they come together for a family conclave, as in Chapter XII. And in the trying on of Mrs. Pullet's new bonnet (Chapter IX) one phase of each sister's character is playfully delineated by her speech.

The problem of individualization of dialogue is one of the first to be met by the writer of the story of character. The most striking faults of dialogue are due to a lack of realization of the characters and a frank disregard of their natural possibilities and limitations. A few crude illustrations drawn from students' work will serve to show the need of a study of the probabilities in speech making. The heroine, a three-year-old, starts off the story: —

"'Say, Bill,' remarked little Isadora.

"'What it it, little one?' asked the big scene-shifter, as he took her up in his arms.

"'I'm a-goin' to speak to the manager and have him cut out that cave scene in the fourth act. I don't like to see them chain my papa down.'

"'But they won't hurt him, sweetheart,' answered the man.

"'No, but I jes' don't like to see 'em do it. I'm goin' to speak to the manager, Bill.' "

The feeling which animates the speech is entirely possible, but the manner of expression is essentially foreign to the average three-year-old. While it must be admitted that there are precocious youngsters in real life, it is to be remembered that their conversation in a story is considerably more distressing because less convincing. A prematurely excellent expression makes any speech unnatural.

"Then Tommy would swing his knife and fork in the air and shout, 'I can get home Christmas Eve, and will I not have a time on Christmas!'" Imagine a real live Tommy *shouting* such a piece of rhetoric to the accompaniment of swinging knife and fork! No, that Tommy was an over-educated little prig, who made the remark in a tone of well-bred quiet, with a covert glance at his elders to note its effect upon them. And, instead of swinging his knife and fork, he laid them side by side, with neat precision, on his plate. Moreover, *Thomas* was his real name.

Dialogue should be true to type as well as to individual. There is no reason why the hired man of a farmer may not use excellent grammar. But when the farmer himself is represented as a man of rough and slovenly speech and the hired man inquires, with much correctness, "Why, you have found my money, have you not?" the reader needs some explanation of the seeming incongruity.

Lack of realization of a definite speech as fitting a special type of character sometimes causes absurd inconsistencies. Witness this mixture of coarseness and elegance in the form of speech of an ignorant Southern white.

He speaks of his daughter to a stranger whom he has just met: —

"'You would think she had been accustomed to silks and velvets all her life,' he said, admiringly, speaking in the slow, drawling accents peculiar to the poorer class of southern whites. 'But Claudine was always a wonderful girl. Takes after her mother in looks. I have never seen a fine lady who could hold a candle to her.'

"'These elegant surroundings become Claudine immensely,' he went on. 'But she has me to thank for them. It was a lucky day when Colonel Rayne fell in love with her pretty face. But she never knew how to look out for her own interests. She would have sent him adrift, like a fool, had I not stepped in and interfered. It is not every day that one has the opportunity to become the mistress of a fine plantation like Bellevue.'

"'No.'

"'I advised Claudine to strike while the iron was hot. She knew better than to disregard my expressed wishes. The wooing was remarkably brief. I took care that it should be. The colonel's infatuation for her beauty was too intense to last. He is very kind to her still — it is his nature. But, between you and me, he would give all his old boots to be free.'"

This is made-up speech, by no means continuously consistent. Effective dialogue, on the other

hand, seems the spontaneous and characteristic expression of an individual under the stress of a special situation.

In the story of character, the purpose of the dialogue is to portray or suggest a mood. Here the test of worth is the importance of that mood or mental state for character delineation, and its interest for the reader. Dialogue should not merely give an insight into the character's mental workings: if it is to be of story interest, it should at some point in the narrative be charged with feeling. Much of the effect of a "crisis" story of character hinges on the dramatic intensity of the dialogue through which the speaker reveals the situation.

Dramatic intensity dialogue cannot have unless it is closely relevant to the situation. In a long novel or in a purely humorous short-story, dialogue may safely be run off the track in order to portray eccentricities or even to throw a sidelight on a minor phase of character. Irrelevance is Samuel Weller's mainspring. But the limitations of space and the demands of unity forbid the story-writer such digressions. The ideal dialogue is not only closely relevant, but even indispensable to the situation. It not only reveals the thought or feeling of an individual — it really pushes the action of the piece. More than this, if it is suggestive, it can be made to

imply whole volumes of back history. Thus the author can relieve himself of a burden of tedious explanation. But the dialogue should never be weighed down so that the reader feels that he is compelled to pause while the characters converse for his benefit. In the scene from "The Mill on the Floss," where the sisters meet with Mrs. Tulliver in family council (Chapter III), not only are four women, three men, and two children distinctly individualized by what they say, but the whole back history is so well implied that the chapter would stand alone. Yet nowhere is the dialogue clogged by explanatory purpose.

In sharp contrast with such individual and dramatic dialogue is that which is made to carry the author's opinions, theories, imaginings, or positive knowledge. The reader who meets such a thought as this in the middle of a love-scene feels that he has truly come upon a bit of cork in his wine: —

"'But now I'm the happiest mortal on earth.'

"'Next to me,' interrupted Jeannette, 'for you see happiness consists in the overplus of expectations.'"

This is a downright abuse of power. The reader has a right to protest against such deceptive doses of information. If an author wishes chiefly to discuss a topic, he should be honest enough to write an essay and have done with it. He should remember

that "the use of quotation marks does not convert a passage into dialogue." [1]

Dialogue should have an interest of its own, aside from its function of characterization and suggestion of the circumstances. It should be made attractive, if possible, by wit, humor, brightness, or sheer individuality. The best way to accomplish this is by placing the characters at an interesting situation. The commonplace talk of ordinary people is not interesting except to themselves at the time that it is uttered. Most of us would be astonished if we could have recorded and rehearsed for us a day of our ordinary conversation. We would blush at our redundancy of dulness. Fortunate it is that so much conversation is not only never recorded and reported, but never thoroughly listened to. The author's effort at realism is responsible for much of the inane prosing on the part of characters. We want real talk in stories, of course, but the real talk of people at special moments in their best trim for conversation. They must be under the influence of some impulse, excitement, or emotion.

Yet it must be remembered, in trying to make the conversation unusually interesting, that dull commonplaceness is no more objectionable to the average reader than is the extremity of cleverness. As soon

[1] Bates, "Talks on Writing English," series 2, p. 211.

as an author is impressed with the idea that he can teach his people to say brilliant things, he is tempted to make them talk in a series of explosive epigrams, as wearing as the setting off of a bunch of fire-crackers and, after all is over, as empty. Some of them even fail to "go off" at all.

Hardly less artificial than epigrammatic conversation is that deeply intellectual kind of talk which we find in the modern psychological novel and the very smart short-story. Perfection in form, it is spun to the finest thread of nothingness of content. Meredith's "The Egoist" has a number of exercises in conversation which are extremely trying to the average intellect. James's "The Tragic Muse" abounds in over-subtle conversation. And Edith Wharton's "The Twilight of the God" is only for the enlightened few. It is one thing to suggest, and another to mystify. This modern form of dialogue is just a little too fine and thin, a little too uniformly sharp and clever, to be mistaken for a reproduction of the conversation of real life.

The tendency of the healthier school of fiction of to-day is to endeavor to secure the effect of ordinary conversation. This does not mean portraiture of an actual bit of talk. It is stupid to imitate the commonplace daily conversation of real life. In talking to our friends, we allow ourselves to be inaccurate

or incomplete, trusting much to their intuition and their knowledge of our characters; or we fill out the meaning by gestures, smiles, and changes of expression, or allusion to some common understanding. Most of these are awkward to render in a story. Perhaps we repeat — most of us do — to make sure that we are understood. This would be ridiculous in print. Actual conversation of ordinary people on ordinary occasions would seem to be intended for a burlesque on human nature. To say that there are, in actual experience, thousands and thousands of conversations which would appear in print unnatural, absurd, impossible, is as much a truism as it would be to say that there are in nature many skies which never will be painted by an artist who values his reputation. Trollope says, in his Autobiography:

"The ordinary talk of ordinary people is carried on in short, sharp, expressive sentences, which, very frequently, are never completed, the language of which, even among educated people, is often incorrect. The novel-writer, in constructing his dialogue, must so steer between absolute accuracy of language — which would give to his conversation an air of pedantry — and the slovenly inaccuracy of ordinary talkers — which, if closely followed, would offend by an appearance of grimace — as to produce upon the ear of his readers a sense of reality."

The problem is, to choose from all the actual things the one or two little things which will suggest the rest. Hardly any conversation needs to be repeated in full; hardly any will bear it. The story-writer selects, combines, gives us typical bits, — mere snatches of conversation which are significant alike of character and situation. To select the significant remarks which will carry along with the mere words the tone, the gesture, the attitude, the full meaning of the speaker; to make reply fit previous remark; and to bind all the talk of the various characters into the complex yet harmonious entity of a single scene or incident with a meaning of its own, requires dramatic instinct of the highest and finest type.

Perhaps the most puzzling question in the handling of dialogue is, How far shall the common talk of everyday life be idealized? And what turn shall this idealization take? The old school of fiction writers "ironed out" their dialogue until it was painfully flat and extensive, and polished and dead. The old-fashioned novel gives us hardly a glimpse of the power of dialogue to reveal character in a single flash and to push the story faster. The talk is careful, strained, laborious; given either to argument and sermonette or to the expression of polite nothings in a sonorous and inflated style. Such

fiction is a sufficient warning against formalizing the dialogue too much.

Yet there is a very legitimate and necessary process of toning down of certain kinds of speech. The repetition of mannerisms becomes, in the hands of an unskilful person, very tiresome. The amateur represents the speech of the college student by ornamenting every other sentence with phrases such as *running in*, *cut*, *flunk*, *stunt*, *prexy*, etc. He represents the street gamin by unspeakable curtailing of words and the concentrated essence of slang of the lower sort, with hardly enough of normal speech to join the abnormal utterances together. He pictures the Western bully as pouring out torrents of profanity at every breath, seemingly regretting that he had to use some prepositions and conjunctions which are not profane. In short, the beginner in story-writing forgets that written conversation has much greater intensity and concentration than the spoken. If one were to reproduce phonographically the conversation of some college students, doubtless the result would be somewhat slangy. Printed, it would seem even more so than it is. This is partly because the reader goes about ten times as fast as the writer, and the expressions which seem to the author very far apart are to him close together. The writer, close at hand, sees things microscopically, doing

justice to every little point. The reader, away off, gets a general impression, — sees things in perspective, — and eccentricities in speech are the things that show up in this general survey. From this fact we may deduce the rule that exaggerated details of speech must not be brought close together; for the reader will narrow the spaces and bring them closer yet.

In connection with the subject of mannerisms it may be well to mention that people must never be represented quite as low as they are, by talk. For in real life there are nearly always qualifying features that condone the lowness. Profanity, for instance, must be used sparingly in a story, or it becomes preposterous. Vulgar slang is subject to the same need of editing. In sketching individuals of the lowest type, special care must be taken in editing the dialogue. This does not mean that the life must be taken out of it. The reason for sparing details of low and vulgar speech is not so much a moral as an artistic one. The exaggeration of such details becomes disgusting.

Another necessary bit of editing is the breaking up of dialogue. In technical discussion, explanation, or argument we can tolerate a long speech if we must. But the average novel that is made to sell abounds in speeches that are too long for the pleasure

of the reader. Many of them are omitted entirely or hastily skimmed by the impatient seeker after story interest. A long-winded character does not appear natural save as a burlesque on humanity. Not that there are no incessant talkers nor that they are not very common indeed. They buttonhole us on every street corner and lecture us from every platform. But the writer of fiction has tacitly promised his readers that he will not bore them this way.

We must remember, too, that speech which is read appears longer than that which is heard, because it is measured by the eye, and because the small relieving accessories of actual speech are seldom even successfully hinted at. Speech should be shortened not only for interest but for the effect of lifelikeness. The skilful interspersion of trenchant commentary not only relieves the dialogue by interruption, but can be made a very helpful accessory in indicating the mood or manner of the speaker. It must not, however, as in the hands of some analysts, overtop the significance of the speech itself. The comment need not be overdone or monotonously worded, as in this bit of dialogue from James's "The Tragic Muse": —

"'I must say — about him — you're not very nice,' Biddy ventured to remark to her brother, hesitating, and even blushing a little.

"'You make up for it, my dear,' the young man answered, giving her chin — a very charming, rotund little chin — a friendly whisk with his forefinger.

"'I can't imagine what you've got against him,' her ladyship murmured, gravely.

"'Dear mother, it's disappointed fondness,' Nick argued. 'They won't answer one's notes; they won't let one know where they are nor what to expect. "Hell has no fury like a woman scorned"; nor like a man either.'

"'Peter has such a tremendous lot to do — it's a very busy time at the Embassy; there are sure to be reasons,' Biddy explained, with her pretty eyes.

"'Reasons enough, no doubt!' said Lady Agnes, who accompanied these words with an ambiguous sigh, however, as if in Paris even the best reasons would naturally be bad ones.

"'Doesn't Julia write to you, doesn't she answer you the very day?' Grace inquired, looking at Nick as if she were the courageous one.

"He hesitated a moment, returning her glance with a certain severity. 'What do you know about my correspondence?'"

The taste for brief and broken speech is indicated by the history of paragraphing. Whatever may be said of the increasingly logical effect of the para-

graph in exposition and argumentation, a mere glance over the history of the narrative paragraph is sufficient to discover that it is very little governed by logical principles, and very largely by the more mechanical principles of ease and variety. The device of devoting a paragraph to each remark of a continuous conversation (including, of course, the essential accompaniments of that remark) is adapted chiefly to the reader's ease. Conversation is no longer paragraphed by its subject-matter.

Owing to the artificial paragraphing of dialogue, the modern short-story has two conspicuous advantages over earlier fiction. First, the brief dialogue contributes largely to the effect of briskness of movement. It is inviting to eye and mind alike. And, second, the author is spared much of the labor and monotony of repeated indication of the speaker. This would seem, at first thought, a minor consideration. When the indication is made easy and varied, we are not conscious of it at all, unless we have a vague feeling that our author has a knack of gracefully suggesting the accessories of conversation. But when the indication is formal or monotonous, it at once obtrudes itself unpleasantly upon our consciousness. We have learned a great deal about the mechanism of dialogue since Defoe wrote "Colonel Jacque": —

"'Hark ye, young man, how old are you?' says my master; and so our dialogue began.

Jacque. Indeed, sir, I do not know.

Master. What is your name?"

Arlo Bates says:[1] —

"The variety does not come by chance, but by care and a finely trained perception of the value of trifles. It is of importance that the exact significance and intensity of the verb employed be taken into account. . . . The author should have a sense of the mood and manner of his personages so clear and so fine that only one of all the possible words shall seem to him to fit. If his dialogue is at all related to real life, it will so vary in its fine shadings that the terms indicating the manner of utterance will vary naturally and inevitably."

The modern author almost unconsciously varies his introductions of the speeches of his characters. But that this has not always been the practice among writers of fiction may be illustrated by a bit of the elegant conversation in Madame D'Arblay's "Evelina": —

"And here, whilst I was looking for the books, I was followed by Lord Orville. He shut the door after he came in, and, approaching me with a look of anxiety, said, 'Is this true, Miss Anville — are you going?'

[1] "Talks on Writing English," Series 1, p. 256.

"'I believe so, my lord,' *said I*, still looking for the books.

"'So suddenly, so unexpectedly: must I lose you?'

"'No great loss, my lord,' *said I*, endeavoring to speak cheerfully.

"'Is it possible,' *said he*, gravely, 'Miss Anville can doubt my sincerity?'

"'I can't imagine,' *cried I*, 'what Mrs. Selwyn has done with those books.'

"'Would to heaven,' continued he, 'I might flatter myself you would allow me to prove it!'

"'I must run upstairs,' *cried I*, greatly confused, 'and ask what she has done with them.'

"'You are going, then,' *cried he*, taking my hand, 'and you give me no hope of any return! Will you not, my too lovely friend, will you not teach me, with fortitude like your own, to support your absence?'

"'My lord,' *cried I*, endeavoring to disengage my hand, 'pray let me go!'

"'I will,' *cried he*, to my inexpressible confusion, dropping on one knee, 'if you wish me to leave you.'

"'Oh, my lord,' *exclaimed I*, 'rise, I beseech you; rise. Surely your lordship is not so cruel as to mock me.'

"'Mock you!' repeated he, earnestly, 'no, I

revere you. I esteem and admire you above all human beings.'"

The extensive use of dialogue in the short-story is a distinctively modern tendency. Perhaps this is the most striking departure that has been made from the practice of the early masters of the art of story-writing. Irving, Hawthorne, and Poe all used dialogue, it is true; but they kept it strictly subordinate, as a process, to their own narrative of the action. The early dialogue had little of the dramatic intensity, of the subtle suggestiveness of the dialogue of to-day. There is no doubt that the writer of short-stories has now, in mechanically perfected dialogue, an added resource not only for making his story interesting, but for fine effects in characterization. Nor is there any doubt, on the other hand, that this splendid accessory of narration is occasionally overworked.

The dialogue short-story is a fad of our day, a fashionable experiment in literature. Here the characters do all the work, — reveal themselves, hint foundation facts, suggest setting, shift scenes, and carry the burden of the plot — and all by means of conversation. If this is done successfully within the limitations of the short-story, it argues skill and cleverness on the part of the author. Its value is another question. The device serves fairly well to ren-

der a single striking thought in a very few striking scenes. But here we challenge the drama to a contest which is bound to be unequal. The chief charm of such an artificial type of story must consist in its suggestiveness — in its fragmentary character. If all short-stories were so limited, we should sadly miss the excellence of the author's occasional descriptive touches, and of his own swift revelation of the mainspring of a character or a situation, as well as the beautiful simplicity of narrative itself. It is safe to predict that the over-emphasis on dialogue as a narrative form will in due time correct itself. It is a noteworthy fact that the most enduring stories, long or short, are those in which dialogue is not the only or even the predominant element.

The excellence, as well as the limitations, of the dialogue short-story may be studied in Ollivant's "The Lord, and the Lady's Glove."[1] Here the dialogue carries the whole plot (which is sufficiently slight), and conveys a lively notion of the characters and of their relation to one another at a special point of time — a strictly unified, almost a momentary situation. The dialogue is polished, clever, fine-spun, expanding the situation to the utmost. But occasionally it grows wearisome through its excess of cleverness. There seem to be two gifts necessary

[1] *McClure's*, February, 1902.

for the best dialogue: psychological insight and dramatic skill. Kipling has enough of the former, and he has the latter in marked degree. Ollivant, in "The Lord, and the Lady's Glove," has a predominance of psychological insight, very fine — indeed, a little too fine and subtle for the enjoyment of many readers. He seems to have been tempted to play unduly with the situation, developing small points too elaborately. It is noteworthy that this story, like most skilful exercises in dialogue, does not "arrive." It simply presents a story situation, isolated, fragmentary. This much dialogue can do well by itself. More than this it should not try to do.

CHAPTER X

THE SETTING

WE may say, in general, that the function of the setting is to furnish, in the best possible way for any given story, the conditions of time and place and characters which shall make that story possible and actual. But the setting may have a variety of special uses. It may merely furnish foundation facts necessary for our understanding of the situation, without actually influencing in any way the outcome of the plot or the development of characters. Setting of this sort should be very slightly emphasized, lest it interfere with the narrative purpose. The necessary information should be given as easily and naturally as possible, that it may not read like the conditions for an algebraic problem. And care must be used in determining what is necessary information. Some authors seem to be tempted to "take an account of stock" every time a character turns around. Descriptive passages which do not influence plot or characters are a mere clog to the short-story. Few readers care to construct imaginary scenes which are

not of value to the narrative. And, as a matter of fact, large masses of descriptive details at the opening of a story usually fail to be reconstructed by the reader. Often they are hastily skimmed or omitted altogether. The beginner in story-writing should learn to regard his initial studies in adjectives as a mere preliminary exercise toward getting started.

If description in the mass is objectionable in the short-story, occasional touches of description are none the less to be desired. Simple narrative like that of the Book of Ruth can succeed in seeming lifelike with very little of description. But the more complex stories of our day are dependent largely, for their realistic effect, upon the "small, familiar touch, making one see." And if one were to select a single point of difference between the low-grade story (which is found in some newspapers and the poorer magazines) and the literary masterpiece, possibly the lack or the abuse of setting would be chosen as most obvious. Excellence of idea, excellence of plot, fail through lack of ability to *realize* a situation in its entirety and picture it suggestively to others. Narrative unfolds a line of action. Short-story endeavors to suggest a single situation or a series of closely related, developing situations in such a way as to make them real and interesting. It is by the aid of what Howells calls "little miracles of

observation" that the illusion of real life can be so rapidly and completely given. An excellent setting has real story value.

A setting may, as in the romance and the story of manners, have in its elements of time and place a definite value for both development of plot and rendering of characters. This is the just and natural use of setting, giving the actual environment of the life of a particular story, and lending charm as well as verity. Thus, Scott's historical romances are largely dependent, for their verisimilitude, upon his excellent use of setting. And perhaps the large majority of sectional short-stories have the setting of time and place and customs for their main stock in trade. Local color has played a sufficiently important part in the art of fiction ever since the time of Scott. That the local short-story has had a real place in literature and still has it, may be proved by a glance over the files of almost any high-grade magazine for the last twenty years. Romanticists and realists unite in attention to the small details of setting. But the pendulum threatens now to swing in the opposite direction. Critics are ready to warn against exaggerated emphasis on this perfectly natural and legitimate source of interest. Peculiarities and novelties of sectional life, they say, are lacking in permanent and universal interest. This

is doubtless true. Peculiarities and novelties alone may make a striking, but never a great short-story. But unique setting may, with the help of unique characters which it aptly fits or a unique story tone or motive, achieve something very like a literary value. Witness the work of Kipling and Harte and Garland, of Cable and Page and Lane and Allen, of Mary Wilkins Freeman and Sarah Orne Jewett — and, in fact, of every one of our modern story-writers who has accomplished creation of character and framed it about with local interest.

A study of the work of these writers will show how it is that the peculiar, the local, the incidental, can be made of permanent and general interest. It is because the scenes described, the peculiar traits and customs of the people, are never there for themselves alone or as a mere device for catching interest, but always for the sake of heightening, either by harmony or by offset, some universal trait or type of character — some great fundamental truth of human nature or human life. The scenes are in no way separable from the story.

We call such a use of setting *structural* because it is so intimately bound up with the development of the characters. We may describe as structural also such description as is essential to the plot. In beginning "The Gold-Bug," Poe indulges in a some-

what elaborate description of the island, a description whose real import appears only as the plot unfolds. Morrison's "On the Stairs" ("Tales of Mean Streets") depends almost entirely for its interest upon the setting. If such a setting be compared with the imaginative, detached scenery of "Rip Van Winkle," it will be seen that there is a wide difference between the structural and the accidental use of setting. Since the time of Poe there has been an increasing effort to secure exquisite harmony in background. In Hamlin Garland's "A Branch Road," the background *is* the story. The exact ethical problem posed never could have been without the precise conditions so realistically presented. The same is true of his "Up the Coulée." The story is a problem in environments.

Besides furnishing environment of characters and the preconditions of plot, setting may be used for contrast or harmony with the essential idea of a story or with its mood and tone. No one has surpassed Poe in the art of setting the tone of a story by the introductory paragraphs. The much-quoted paragraph of description at the opening of "The Fall of the Melancholy House of Usher" will serve for illustration. The reader is drawn at once by the atmosphere of gloom into the tragic mood. Every word of description carries with it a dead weight of

impending disaster. Hamlin Garland makes a similar if less conspicuous use of setting in "Under the Lion's Paw."

A bit of nature may be made to harmonize with the mood of a character in a story, as in the two excellent descriptive paragraphs at the crises in Meredith's "The Ordeal of Richard Feverel." In the short-story, as well as in the novel, such a use of setting has long been customary.

But in real life, nature does not always fit our moods, nor do we always adapt ourselves to hers. And characters often stand out in sturdy contrast with their whole environment. Perhaps it is a recognition of this fact, or perhaps it is merely a distaste for the more familiar principle of harmony, that has led many modern writers to use their scenery and their descriptions of characters as strong offset for the theme and the mood of the story. Thus in "Emmy," [1] a story which brings for a time dull misery of mood, Mrs. Wilkins Freeman uses the colorless setting to throw into high relief one bright, warm, living fact — the love of the young New England girl. The landscape along the bluff is bleak and dreary. All is purposeless, wind-blown — generally lacking in warmth of color and vigor of life. The very existence of Emmy is a barren

[1] *Century*, 19: 499.

waste until the one brief season of love, when she rises from the dead level of monotony to the height of the heroic.

The same principle of contrast is elaborately illustrated in the introductory paragraph of "The Last Choice of Crusty Dick":[1] —

"It was a very commonplace, uninteresting spot, which one would be sure to forget within a single day. There are a million such places, more or less, in the arid southwest. All around, as far as the eye could reach, the level plain was set with sparse clumps of prickly-pear and grease weed, but such things really count for nothing in such a country. A mile or more to the east, a barren red hill had, once upon a time, wakened to life and heaved itself aloft; but that was long, long ago — so very long the hill itself appeared to have forgotten about it. The heat waves that flickered in the air distorted the rugged outlines, and set them in seeming motion, as though the hill were about to move again. But all the desert knew better, for, in all the ages since it had possessed itself of that country, that hill had continually threatened to move, notwithstanding which, it had not once changed its position. So the thin, dry grass twisted and curled back upon itself and tried, in every other way, to withdraw itself from the

[1] *McClure's*, December, 1902.

terrible heat of the sun, and had not even a languid apprehension that anything would happen.

"To the west, right at hand, as one might say, a red, granite rock, big as a house, had in other ages burst the bonds of the earth, and stuck its head out in the air. But so hot did it find it, and so dull, it was plainly sorry of its reckless irruption; it drooped repentantly, as if promising never to do it again.

"In all that commonplace of desolation, absolutely the only thing worth looking at was a slender trickle of water, which perseveringly pushed itself up, along the break in the earth made by the protruding rock. In any other country, if anybody had ever noticed its existence, it would have been called a seep, and it would have been set about thickly with waving flags and nodding ferns. In the desert, it was a spring, known and honored by every lonesome, wandering man and beast on one side of the great range, and it was ornamented by a straggling fringe of dry, white bones, which lay upon its bosom like a string of pearls adorning the neck of a bride.

"If it be true that every landscape has a story of its own, which can be read in the expression of its features, then one looking at that spot would be justified in believing himself able to see, as plainly as if it had been written in the palm of his hand, these

words, 'Since the dawn of creation nothing whatever has happened here.' Yet, within the memory of men still living, that rock has looked down upon at least one ambush and massacre, as dreary as the scene that surrounded it, and God alone knows what other horrors it has witnessed.

"It was in the morning, with the sun part way up the sky, when all around the eastern side of the rock, a swirling tangle of men and horses, of wagons and harness, an intricate and confused current of disorder, set slowly toward the spring. Along the edges, the sparse bunches of grease weed and prickly-pear were exploding rapidly, going pop, pop, pop, as if the surface of the desert were breaking out in a noisy eruption. Out of the popping there rose curls of white smoke, ascending vertically through the dead air, climbing steadily, as though set upon some lofty, common errand."

A more abstracted use of setting is found in the type of narrative which exists for the purpose of enforcing a particular idea. Here the setting must be brought into harmony with the life or inner meaning — the essential truth which gives the story its significance. The finest model in producing such a subtle harmony of atmosphere is that writer who most delicately enforces spiritual ideas — Nathaniel Hawthorne.

The setting of a story may once have been furnished entirely at the beginning. This is very seldom the case to-day. With the cutting down of the length of introductory paragraphs has come increasing emphasis on the occasional touches of description. Instead of one fixed landscape, we have many glimpses, just as in real life. A writer who enjoys picture effects may still indulge his taste if he makes quick and fleeting pictures. That considerable description may be successfully introduced into the short-story may be seen from a study of James W. Linn's "The Girl at Duke's."[1]

"Duke's slept in the hot sun. . . . The railroad, toiling over the ruddy desert, crosses a little empty run, which in some seasons holds water from heaven knows where; and at the crossing stands, or crouches, Duke's. Rose-red hills, clasping in their jealous hearts the secret of fertility, some day to be delivered up at the touch of the Genius — rose-red, sun-smitten, dusty, treeless, grassless, waterhills roll and roll endlessly away from Duke's, lonely and bare as in the ages before history began; bisected by the two gleaming steel rails, seeming inhuman somehow, savage as the cacti, and no more a part of civilization than the flickering, quivering, sun-devils are which dance hour after hour above them

[1] *McClure's*, August, 1903.

to the monotonous fiddling of Phaeton in his fiery chariot. Duke's is a tank, a platform, a little wooden shanty, and a name."

So much for introduction. The scenery then grows into the story, appearing at intervals through its intimate relation to the mood of the chief characters.

"She looked about her, and saw her trunk some rods from her. Farther off, the line of dying green showed where the creek had been. A lizard ran along the edge of the platform, and, perceiving her, made an odd little noise in its throat, like the snapping of a match-box. Otherwise, there was no sign of life anywhere. Half an hour passed; an hour. Her uncle was long in coming! The shade of the tiny station shifted lazily over the hot boards. She made an effort to draw her trunk within it, for she was tired of standing, but, though she flushed and panted in her endeavor, she was unsuccessful. Another half-hour passed. Her eyes were weary with gazing across the glowing slopes, and her brain ached with waiting. Off in the distance a bird lazily sailed, and she followed its flight aimlessly. A red rock looming upon a hill, a rock of sandstone carved and machicolated by the centuries, confronted her, and she stared at it till presently it glared and blurred, for she was crying."

And, again, in the course of the story:—

"She went to the window and looked out, and the sight drew her, in spite of herself, into the open. She was in the emerald heart of a world of coral-pink. Softer than scarlet, more glowing than pink, the earth lay suffused, tinted like the embers of a dying fire. Gradually the plains became one rose; deep purple lowered in the sky, orange and gold and pearl; yet still the marvel and the richness of the rose claimed them and won them all, won them into its heart. Dorothy watched it; and for long minutes there was no change, no diminution of its irresistible splendor ; the beauty was flaunted unendurably, as if God would forgive the world no jot of abasement before his terrible glory. Then slowly a gray veil began to film the heavens; for a moment, as the rose faded, the bright colors gleamed and displayed themselves again in bands and streaks and burning, prismatic spots; then, suddenly, as if the fire were dead, the wind blew the embers black, and night fell." Yet again, the landscape takes on a different aspect, in the drive toward the station, an aspect distinctly traceable to the mood of the girl through whose eyes we are led to view it. If any justification were needed for the large use made of description here, it might be pointed out that the story makes its impression through the vivid picturing of a situation unique in its unconventionality, and

that the natural setting is the essential background to this picture. Obvious enough also is the interpretative value of these landscape passages for the development of the love motive (notably the contrast between the *tone* of the passage quoted just above and that of the introductory paragraph). But a simpler explanation of the acceptability of such descriptive passages is that, without in any way delaying the progress of the story, they add the element of beauty.

Thus we see that, in a variety of ways, the setting may give breadth, depth, significance, and beauty to a story. But we must also see that, unless it is presented with taste and common sense, setting is a very doubtful element of literary value. Whether its purpose be to furnish bare facts which shall make possible the development of the plot, to introduce the characters, to transport the reader to another age and clime and another kind of life in order to charm by local interest; whether it be to add the element of beauty, to point a motive, or suggest a mood; or, whether it be the simpler and more universal purpose to render the characters convincing by placing them in real surroundings, rather than in isolation, — it is to be remembered that setting is successful generally through its subordination to the particular purpose of the story.

THE SECTIONAL SHORT-STORY

In America the realistic tendency of story-writers has manifested itself recently in a special department of literature — the sectional short-story.[1] The democratic spirit has given rise to an eager desire to know thoroughly man and his conditions. The result is a broader knowledge, a deeper sympathy, a solidifying of interests throughout the states. And these are the highest aims of the local story.

Mark Twain and Bret Harte may be taken as representatives of the California slope; Hamlin Garland, of the Northwest; Gilbert Parker, of Canada; Hawthorne, Mary Wilkins Freeman, and Sarah Orne Jewett, of New England; James Lane Allen and John Fox, Jr., of Kentucky; Joel C. Harris and Julia Magruder, of Virginia; Thomas Nelson Page, of Georgia; George W. Cable, Ruth Stuart, and Grace King, of Louisiana; and "Charles Craddock" of the Tennessee mountains. A careful study of the best stories of these writers is sufficient to convince one of the fact that, whether or not they shall be of permanent interest (Hawthorne's fame

[1] The place of the local or sectional short-story in the short-story literature of to-day would make an excellent topic for research. Abundant material may be drawn from the files of critical magazines for the last decade.

has proved itself), they are filling a need to-day. And it is safe to predict that a number of the stories will survive, inasmuch as the local color is not made the whole or even the chief interest, but rather is so woven into the story that it seems essential to it. And the stories are of character, rather than of places or of customs.

THE USE OF DIALECT IN THE SHORT-STORY

The "local color" story has brought to something like mechanical perfection the device of dialect, or local language. Unfortunately, it has somewhat overdone the business, so as to call forth protests from the critics. Barrett, in his "Short-Story Writing," practically annihilates the use of dialect — at least by amateurs. Bates's comment ("Talks on Writing English," p. 245) is almost as cutting: —

"We are all familiar with a certain strange appearance which has of late years come over the pages of the magazines, a sort of epidemic of which the most prominent characteristics are the misspelling of words and a plentiful scattering of apostrophes, as if the secret of literary art lay in eccentric and intermittent orthography."

The aimless misspelling and corruption of speech can hardly be condemned too strongly. But the

condemnation may not be made wholesale, in virtue of the excellence of such stories as those in Barrie's "A Window in Thrums," Cable's "Old Creole Days," and Kipling's tales of India. Here we see dialect at its best — as a device for individualizing character and at the same time suggesting the tone of the character's environment.

The dialect stories which are written merely for the sake of exhibiting the eccentricities of a local language should be classed in didactic, rather than imaginative, literature. When dialect is used for its own sake, it is likely to be tiresome in the first reading and uninviting to a second. Difficult dialect should be used very sparingly, if at all. No dialect should be reproduced entire. The best American writers and most French writers use only enough of dialect to suggest the tone of speech. They remember that dialect is a flavor and not a substance, and avoid an overdose of it as they would the use of strong perfumes.

If we agree that the function of dialect is to give coloring or atmosphere, rather than to portray actual peculiarities of speech or manner of thinking, we need not concern ourselves greatly over its absolute accuracy. This it can never attain. For dialect is almost entirely a matter of spoken words, depending on the quality of the voice, its rise and

fall, its accent, its inflection. Of these English orthography cannot be tortured into adequate representation. Enunciation, slur, and modulation cannot be gotten into print. Possibly for this reason, we prefer to read a dialect not thoroughly familiar to us. Our critical faculties are lulled by ignorance, and we permit ourselves to be drawn by the lure into a new current of life in which we are content to drift. We then test dialect, as we should always do, by its consistency and plausibility, rather than by its phonographic accuracy.

In historical romances, dialect is especially in danger of being overemphasized as a mere trick of the trade. Exclamations such as *gadzooks*, *od's bodikins*, *gog's wounds*, *egad*, and *by the rood* do not give historical setting, and a very few of them will be all the reader needs.

That modern dialect has been made infinitely more plausible, more real, than the early dialect, may be made certain by a comparison of the use of dialect in the clever and interesting newsboy sketch, "Wanted: A Matchmaker," by Paul Ford,[1] with the local language in the eighteenth-century novel. Smollett gives us an occasiónal touch of crude dialect. And Defoe, in "Colonel Jacque," gives us a full dose. Defoe has suddenly broken away from

[1] *Harper*, September, 1900.

his first person narrative to present an idea on the negro problem by a bit of dialogue: —

"He shook his head and made signs that he was *muchee sorree*, as he called it. . . . 'Me will,' says he, 'run, go, fetch, bring for you as long as me live.' . . .

"He looked very serious at me and said, 'Oh, that not so; the masters say so, but no be so, no be so, indeede, indeede,' and so we parleyed.

"*Jacque.* Why do they say so, then? To be sure, they have tried you all.

"*Negro.* No, no, they no try: they say so, but no try.

"*Jacque.* I hear them all say so.

"*Negro.* Me tell you the true; they have no mercie; they beat us all cruel, all cruel; they never have show mercie. How can they tell we be no better?

"*Jacque.* What! Do they never spare?

"*Negro.* Master, me speakee the true; they never give mercie; they always whippee, lashee, knockee down, all cruel. Negro be muchee better man, do muchee better work, but they tell us no mercie.

"*Jacque.* But what, do they never show any mercy?

"*Negro.* No, never; no, never; all whippee;

all whippee; all whippee, cruel, worse than they whippee de horse, whippee de dog.

"*Jacque.* But would they be better if they did?

"*Negro.* Yes, yes, negro be muchee better if they be mercie. When they be whippee, whippee, negro muchee cry, muchee hate; would kill if they had de gun. But when they makee de mercie, then negro tell de great tankee, and love to worke, and do muchee worke; and because he good master to them.

"*Jacque.* They say no; you would laugh at them and mock when they show mercy.

"*Negro.* How they say when they no show mercie? They never show mercie; me never see them show one mercie since me live."

This dialect sounds like a conglomeration of Indian, Chinese, French, and negro; and, however it may have seemed in Defoe's day, it is not convincing now. Unconvincing dialogue is grotesque. Slightly absurd also is Thackeray's touch of dialect in "The Newcomes" where the Jew says, "Step id, Bister Doocob, ady day idto Vordor Street" — a catarrhal dialect to which the Gentile too is liable.

After reading this inaccurate dialect, it is a relief to turn even to such a peculiar dialect as the New Mennonite, as treated by a painstaking writer of

our day, Helen Martin.[1] But no matter what technical perfection dialect has attained, it must be treated as a device and not an end, a device likely to be of temporary and ephemeral interest unless it has acquired universal and permanent value through its contribution to that greatest source of literary interest — human character.[2]

[1] Note the use of dialect in "The Betrothal of Elypholate Yingst," *Cosmopolitan*, June, 1903.

[2] The young student needs to be repeatedly cautioned that even in misspelling there are certain accepted standards which forbid faulty eliminations such as those in a bit of dialect taken from a student's theme, "Please, could you tell me whe'e the police headqua'ete's a'e?"

CHAPTER XI

THE REALISTIC MOVEMENT

It is with hesitation that one approaches this much discussed and variously interpreted question of the possibilities and the limitations of realism in fiction. If the subject were not so large, it would long ago have been worn threadbare. But it presents itself in new guise every now and then, and is an ever present literary problem. The word *realism* has taken on a great variety of meanings, at least two of which must be clearly distinguished before there can be any profitable discussion.

Realism has been carefully and elaborately defined by many writers. One of the broadest definitions is that of Howells, where he says, "Realism is nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material, and Jane Austen was the first and the last of the English novelists to treat material with entire truthfulness." [1] But, like all comprehensive definitions, this is not altogether satisfying. Immediately the question arises, What constitutes *truthful* treatment of material? And we find we have made little progress. Again, Howells says,

[1] "Criticism and Fiction," p. 73.

with Emerson: "I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic. . . . I embrace the common; I sit at the feet of the familiar and the low." But here the realist joins hands with the human romanticist. Who has more enthusiastically embraced the common and sat at the feet of the familiar and the low than the romantic poets, Burns and Wordsworth? It may be objected that their aim was the exalting of the humble and the low into the heroic and the romantic. But the great realist is in sympathy with this aim to some extent. For that there is genuine worth in the humble and the lowly theme has long been a favorite bone of contention with him. And the strictest realists would hardly contend that either Burns or Wordsworth has falsified his material to point a moral, or has shorn it of its native simplicity and truth. This only goes to show that, although the term *realism* is commonly interpreted as being opposed to *romance*, on the one hand, and to *idealism*, on the other, it cannot be definitely distinguished from them once for all, nor can it be set over into complete opposition to them. For we shall see that the best realism has something of idealism in it, and that it employs many of the same literary methods as romance. For spiritual meaning can be shown within the real; and the boundary line between remembered fact and fancy is a shadowy one, at

best. We cannot label any splendid work of fiction romantic or realistic or even idealistic; for it has in it something of all these attributes. It is only a question of proportion. So let us see on what elements the realists lay stress.

Zola, in his "Le Roman Experimental," defines realism as the "negation of fancy" (including the romantic and the rhetorical); as the "exclusion of the ideal" — that is, of all not firmly based on the actual life of human beings; and, as the omission of all that is grotesque, unreal, nebulous, or didactic. Realism, he says, is contemporary, founded on and limited by actual experience. In dealing with men, the realist "trusts to principles of action, rejecting formulas of character." In spirit he is "analytical, not lyrical, painting men as they are." Zola excludes, then, from the world of fiction romance, fantasy, the hidden spiritual truth, the interpretation of human character and human life — in a word, the *personal point of view*. And quite as significant is his inclusion of all experienced fact as literary material. It is this phase of realism that has led to the endless controversy between the idealists and the realists, waged now on æsthetic and now on moral grounds. Howells says: "Nothing that God has made is contemptible. He (the realist) cannot look upon human life and declare this thing or that thing unworthy of

notice, any more than the scientist can declare a fact of the material world beneath the dignity of his inquiry. He feels in every nerve the equality of things and the unity of men; his soul is exalted, not by vain shows and shadows and ideals, but by realities, in which alone the truth lives." It is this view of literature that is responsible for the dull, commonplace, prosaic, trifling, petty fiction which gives as its only excuse for existence the fact that it has its counterpart in the dull, prosaic, trifling pettinesses of our daily life — that it is uncompromisingly, deplorably true to the most worthless features of our life.[1]

Our modern realists have vied with the scientists in exploring the minutiæ of life with a painstaking zeal worthy of a better cause. But when a scientific writer of intelligence can devote a chapter to "Parental Affection, as seen in the Earwig," what shall we expect of the literary man who follows such false leads? The constant use of the microscope is very likely to disturb proportions. And it is still a live question whether any art can long survive the application to it of scientific aims and scientific standards. The true artist is likely to go on protesting, as he has done through the ages, that there is

[1] An amusing realistic transcript from a man's daily life is made by Winchester, "Principles of Literary Criticism," p. 162.

no such divine equality of things, that art "values" of all kinds and degrees exist in our experience. The right of selection is exercised by the realist as well as by the idealist; only the realist seeks out by preference the small, the common, and the normal. These are to him the only real. And, if shadows and ideals are non-existent to the realist — if he truly does find comfort in confining himself within the narrow limits of his own actual experience, there is no reason why he should not be allowed to occupy this small literary compartment in peace — only provided that he does not crowd out his neighbors from their compartments. It has been genuinely amusing to observe the sweet complacency with which the narrower type of realist congratulates himself that he has not only the front room or the top story, but the whole edifice. One distinguished realist of our day remarks, "It is saying very little to say that I value more such a novel as Mr. James's 'The Tragic Muse' than all the romantic attempts since Hawthorne." But the general reading public has not yet been educated out of its childish preference for a plot. Again, our critic says, "The art of fiction, as Jane Austen knew it, declined from her through Scott, and Bulwer, and Dickens, and Charlotte Brontë, and Thackeray, and even George Eliot."[1]

[1] "Criticism and Fiction," p. 73.

While this is, beyond doubt, a thoroughly sincere appreciation, one who was not familiar with Howells's admiration for the "divine Jane" would be tempted to regard this as literary criticism put in blinkers. It would indeed be unfortunate for the cause of realism if all the critics should agree that the narrow world, the somewhat tame, though exquisite miniature work, and the small emotional power of "Pride and Prejudice" and "Mansfield Park" were worth more to the reading world than the broad circle, the strong and vivid characterization, the richness and fulness, the intense emotional power of "Vanity Fair" and "The Newcomes." Thackeray is such a big realist that he is also a romanticist and idealist; and, whatever category you put him under, he sticks out around the edges. Therefore he must be shut out from the elect of realism, forsooth, or accept a humble place at the tail end of the downward grade from the summit of Jane Austen! (But then, he has George Eliot to keep him company.) Thackeray's practice hints at some such creed as Maurice Thompson's:[1] —

"No true art is ever a parasite, nor ever a forced growth, taking color or quality under the touch of self-conscious manipulators, who model by alien standards of ethical and æsthetical limitations."

[1] "Domain of Romance," *Forum*, v. 8.

Realism is not new in literature; it has only grown some new excrescences. Realism and romance sprang up in fiction about the same time; and they have flourished ever since by turns or side by side. The critics have had something to do with their succession; but the age and the people have had a great deal more. The literary pendulum has swung somewhat regularly back and forth, in accordance with the impulse of the spirit of the age. And when men's interests suffer a reaction, as they are bound to do on reaching the extremity of any literary method, all the critics can do is to hang on and be carried with the pendulum or stand back and watch it go.

But the influence of realism on literary *methods* has been vast and, in most respects, beneficent. The realistic writer insists on the illusion of truth, giving value to the specific, the minute. The attention to the choice of exquisitely suggestive details, the "small, familiar touch, making one see," has made itself felt in all literature, even the most romantic. For this is, after all, a question of technique. Swift, Defoe, and Poe, daring romancers every one, have the concreteness, the vivid illusion of truth that is the result of realistic methods. It is only to be regretted that some realists have lost themselves in a maze of hopelessly insignificant details, and that they have become incapable of the larger vision.

Again, in opening up the everyday world, the ground of the common and the lowly, as literary domain, realism has done a vast service to fiction in general and to the short-story in particular. The little stories of real life so deservedly popular to-day have frequently a noble aim closely akin to that of the great romantic movement that stirred the literary world to its depths in the early part of the nineteenth century. Everyday life and normal human character abound in minor themes admirably adapted to the scope of the short-story.

But, in its abnormal phases, realism has seemed to delight in the vulgar and the low for its own sake. Now the vulgar and the low have in themselves no literary value, and they cannot be given any without the aid of interpretation. Just here the realists are a little shaky. Howells says that the realist "is careful of every fact, and feels himself bound to express or to indicate its meaning at the risk of overmoralizing. In life he finds nothing insignificant; all tells for destiny and character."[1] Yet he goes on to criticise Balzac for his interpretation of characters and for not letting them speak for themselves. And Zola forbids all interpretation. The truth is, realists differ widely on this point, both in theory and in practice. The French seem to have

[1] "Criticism and Fiction," p. 15.

acquired the knack of detaching their ethical point of view, as they would lay aside a pair of spectacles, so that they can portray any and every part of a by no means narrow or sequestered life with the same fidelity that distinguished the virtuous Jane Austen, but with very different results. The spirit of Fielding animates the grosser "naturalists" to-day. It is literary barbarism, naked and unashamed.

This grosser phase of realism has no application whatever to short-story art. Its only excuse is, that it endeavors to portray the whole of life and cannot in truth omit the gross. The short-story makes no such claims; and the repeated choice of such material here would pretty clearly indicate the author's taste for the vulgar and the immoral in preference to the pure and the good. The limitation of the aim and scope of the modern short-story has therefore saved it from the mire of naturalism.

Shunning the gross and indecent, the extremists in America have taken up the "problem" fiction, a comparatively innocent branch of realistic naturalism. Here we have interpretation with a vengeance and analysis run riot. Possibly the authors of the realistic psychological novels think they are analyzing impartially and scientifically, but the unenlightened one feels that he has run up against an Individual Point of View. Pure realism, as Zola defines it, is

a practical impossibility in fiction, inasmuch as it does away with the individual point of view. The universal elements of our experience contribute to the sum of our knowledge; but they can never contribute to our literature until they have added to them the personal element. The author is bound to interpret, else literature were as soulless as a photograph. He cannot escape interpretation; for it is only because experience *means* something to him that he cares to extend and make it permanent by giving it literary expression.

Moreover, there is no such thing as absolute truth to experience in fiction. Omit one detail, select another; slur one and emphasize another, — have you falsified? If so, you may have done it in the interest of a higher truth than that of fact — the imaginative truth of consistency — in accordance with the aim or purpose of your portrait. It must be remembered that the whole reality is not given without the relation of a particular bit of experience to the past and to the future and to those immediately connected with the characters chiefly concerned. This, too, requires interpretation.

Now, if the novel cannot get along without interpretation, the short-story is still more dependent on it. It has, as was said before, no aim to portray the whole of life impartially; instead, it aims *to*

present and to interpret a single phase of life. It is nothing without a point. The short-story may be as simple and as homely as you will, it may be minute and accurate in detail, it can even survive the lack of romance and high idealism; but it cannot do without interpretation and the personal point of view. The short-story takes the best of realism, the best of romance, the best of idealism, and makes them all its own. It endeavors to express, in the concrete form of a vivid picture of life, the underlying laws of human nature that govern our affections, our passions, our conduct — that determine our character and our relations to one another. And it is this aim at fundamental truths in concrete form, rather than the technique by which it works, that is the all-important.

CHAPTER XII

THE ELEMENT OF FANTASY

THE term *romance* has taken on such a variety of meanings that the word *fantasy* is here selected to include a portion of what is generally included under the romantic and something more — the weird, the supernatural, the mysterious, and the unexplained. Maurice Thompson, in his article on "The Domain of Romance" (*Forum*, 8: 328), says that "the difference between realism and romance seems to be the remainder left over when delineation is subtracted from interpretation." If so, every good short-story must include something of romance. But a commoner interpretation of the term seems to include an element of remoteness of place or time; or an element of the abnormal or unusual in experience, of the frankly impossible; or the element of the supernatural, including the weird or the uncanny, and the simple but intangible spiritual truths.

All these lines of interest the stricter realist would bar out from fiction. Critics have said, from time to time, There shall be no more romance. But even then the chariot of romance was whirling inevitably

by, no more to be checked by the voice of a critic than by the barking of a dog. We have an outstripping curiosity, a winged imagination, and "an insatiable desire to know what is on the other side of the wall." [1] And, as long as man has an imagination and a soul, there will be fantasy in literature. You may thrust it out and bolt the door, but it will slip in through the keyhole and present itself to every sensitive temperament, a living and all but tangible reality.

Our taste for wonder is probably elemental and primitive. If it were not deep-rooted, the scientists would have explained it away with a microscope a century ago. Howells ingeniously explains it down to a "lapse back into savagery and barbarism." [2] He does not blame us for these inevitable moods, which he describes as "innocent debauches" and places on a par with the circus and negro minstrelsy. Hawthorne delighted in these innocent debauches. Let us follow him through one of them, in order thoroughly to appreciate the fantastic mood indulging itself at length: [3] —

"*Salem, Mar.* 12, 1843. — That poor home! How desolate it is now! Last night, being awake,

[1] George Fenn, "The Art of Mystery in Fiction," *North American*, 156: 432. [2] "Criticism and Fiction," p. 109.

[3] "American Note Book," 2: 115.

. . . my thoughts travelled back to the lonely old Manse; and it seemed as if I were wandering upstairs and downstairs all by myself. My fancy was almost afraid to be there alone. I could see every object in a dim, gray light, — our chamber, the study, all in confusion; the parlor, with the fragments of that abortive breakfast on the table, and the precious silver forks, and the old bronze image, keeping its solitary stand upon the mantel-piece. Then, methought, the wretched Vigwiggie came, and jumped upon the window-sill, and clung there with her forepaws, mewing dismally for admittance, which I could not grant her, being there myself only in the spirit. And then came the ghost of the old Doctor, stalking through the gallery, and down the staircase, and peeping into the parlor; and though I was wide awake and conscious of being many miles from the spot, still it was quite awful to think of the ghost having sole possession of our home; for I could not quite separate myself from it, after all. Somehow the Doctor and I seemed to be there *tête-à-tête*. . . . I believe I did not have any fantasies about the ghostly kitchen-maid; but I trust Mary left her flat-irons within her reach, so that she may do all her ironing while we are away, and never disturb us more at midnight. I suppose she comes hither to iron her shroud, and perhaps, likewise,

to smooth the Doctor's band. Probably during her lifetime, she allowed him to go to some ordination or other grand clerical celebration with rumpled linen; and ever since, and throughout all earthly futurity (at least, as long as the house shall stand), she is doomed to exercise a nightly toil with a spiritual flat-iron. Poor sinner! — and doubtless Satan heats the irons for her. What nonsense is all this! But, really, it does make me shiver to think of that poor home of ours."

Surely an innocent recreation this! The particular fantastic mood here indulged is not of value for the rest of us save as it may have trained Hawthorne's imagination to higher and surer flights. But if you should rob Hawthorne of his fantasy, you would take away one of the most original and precious bits of genius America has yet produced. Poe robbed of fantasy would be healthier, perhaps, but not a genius; and Irving without a touch of fantasy would be dull, to say the least. Fantasy, more than any other single element, is characteristic of the temperamental moods of that great trio of American writers who established the short-story as a special literary form. Among English writers, Kipling and Stevenson excel in the use of fantasy (Kipling being rather finer and more subtile, as well as more audacious). And the best German and French short-

story writers also make free use of fantasy — indeed, in one form or another, it may be said to be almost essential for the production of a variety of original story motives and story situations.

A comparison of Irving and Poe and Hawthorne will show three distinct types of fantasy characteristic of the temperament and the genius of each. Irving is genuinely human, and his fantasy is warm and sunny, however exaggerated it may be.

Poe is to be studied for marvels and wonders and horrors. The Spanish critic, Landa, says that Poe "has been the first story-writer to exploit the field of science in the department of the marvellous . . . and first to exploit the marvellous in morbid psychology with scientific art." Poe's is a peculiar literary gift — that of vivid portrayal, stamping an impression almost instantaneously. He had a genius for suggestive and convincing detail. As Lowell says, he "does not leave a pin or a button unnoticed." But this very fidelity to detail sets off and intensifies the mystery. Morbid his fantasy is, beyond question; yet, even without taking into account the underlying mental disease, it is great fantasy — daring, original, and of compelling interest. George Fenn, in the article quoted on the use of mystery, compares the reading of a mystery story to the experience of being sucked into a whirlpool and drawn round and

round to the inevitable centre. Every one who reads Poe must have gone through some such experience. One may say he prefers a sweeter, sunnier fantasy; but he goes on reading, just the same. Poe's brain had a "rift of ruin" in it from the start — a rift which only widened with experience. Passionately fond of beauty, he conceived the melancholy idea that beauty and grace are interesting only in their overthrow. "I have imbibed," he says, "the shadows of fallen columns at Balbec, and Tadmor, and Persepolis, until my very soul has become a ruin." And his stories have the romantic interest of glimpses of splendid ruins.

In comparison with Poe's, Hawthorne's fantasy, even where it treats a morbid theme, is natural and wholesome. Like Poe, he freely violates the laws of fact, but he very rarely violates those of nature — never those of human nature. Hawthorne had an insight into the sane and the insane; but he kept a perfect balance between the two. "His mood was romantic; his habitual atmosphere that of dusky dawns and twilights, sylvan solitudes and moonlit landscapes. He could not endure the clear, sharp light of high noon. . . . His romantic temperament is seen in the choice and treatment of his themes, as well as in the background against which he sets his pictures of life and the atmosphere he throws

about them. His art deals fundamentally with the haunting mysteries of the human soul. His mind is fascinated with the secret workings of conscience, the effects of crime upon the perpetrator; subtle, peculiar, and sometimes morbid problems of conduct; and the secret, vagrant, unspoken impulses and passions that, for good or evil, ruffle the bosoms of stainless maid and hardened criminal alike."[1] Yet Hawthorne employed the morbid and mysterious with the uniform purpose of illustrating in the concrete certain natural laws and spiritual truths, thereby fulfilling one of the truest definitions of romance — "the exhibition of familiar motive in unfamiliar circumstance."[2]

In the story of fantasy, the young writer will be likely to experience some difficulty at the first; but the training it will afford his imagination is worth the while, even if the early products should prove crude or startling, and be unworthy of the name of literature. There is a boundless field of subjects here, and a chance for absolute originality of treatment. And, if the student will steep himself in the atmosphere of Poe, Hawthorne, and Kipling, he will come to avoid instinctively the worst violations of literary standards.

[1] F. C. Lockwood, "Hawthorne as a Literary Artist," *Methodist Review*, September–October, 1904.

[2] Winchester, "Principles of Literary Criticism."

NOTE. — Brander Matthews's "The Philosophy of the Short-Story" contains an interesting chapter comparing Poe's and Hawthorne's use of fantasy.

NOTE. — The "mystery" story proper may be roughly divided into two classes, that mystery which is wholly or partly solved, and that which leaves with the reader a vivid expression of the unseen and supernatural forces. The superior impressionistic power of the latter class may be seen by comparing such stories as Kipling's "At the End of the Passage" and Fitz-James O'Brien's "What Was It? A Mystery" with the solved "Ghost Story," a fair representative of the former class.

CHAPTER XIII

THE EMOTIONAL ELEMENT

A STORY cannot claim rank as literature unless it have in it the power to evoke in the sympathetic reader some stirring of emotion. But, essential as is the feeling tone of a story, it is an element which submits itself with difficulty to analysis. And the young writer whose work lacks emotional power can do little more than trust to time to broaden and deepen his emotional experiences. If he has eyes to see, mind to judge, and heart to feel the human life about him, emotions will arise in him spontaneously. They cannot be prematurely forced.

It was the attempt to force the emotional element into fiction that brought about that tremendous amateurish blunder of *sentimentalism* in eighteenth-century fiction. Winchester says, in his "Principles of Literary Criticism": "All forms of sentimentalism in literature result from the endeavor to excite the emotions of pathos or affection without adequate cause. Emotions thus easily aroused or consciously indulged for their own sake, have something hollow about them. The emotion excited by

the true artist is grounded upon the deep truths of human life. It springs from a great and worthy cause, and is necessarily infrequent in occurrence."

I. *The Love Element*

The more expansive form of the novel has always been better adapted to the purpose of the sentimentalist; but the brevity of the short-story has not made it thoroughly immune to the disease. It is especially in the love story that the symptoms of sentimentalism appear. It is not extreme to say that if one were to read, with an exercise of sympathy, half of the great mass of ordinary and commonplace love stories which appear in the average magazine, — stories with nothing unique in character, in situation, in the quality or the results of the affection, — he would perforce become a sentimentalist through the repeated irritation of his emotions along the same channel without adequate cause in the enlistment of his interest in an unusual situation or a vividly realized character. The magazine editors claim that the reading public demands the love element in the short-story. This is doubtless partly true; but it is an open question whether, if more high-grade magazines should admit stories not confined to the presentation of young love between the

sexes, the character of the magazine-reading public would not undergo a striking change. Many mature and experienced thinkers seem to be ashamed to be caught reading a magazine of fiction, and to feel called upon to explain their offence, as if the onlookers would necessarily condemn them as weakly sentimental.

There would seem to be no valid reason why the popular magazine should set its standards wholly by the tastes and inclinations of the immature readers at a single stage of their development. That the romantic period of youth is very often of importance to the life of the individual, that the majority of people do pass through it, and that those who are passing through it experience a morbid craving for sentimental stimulation, are facts not to be denied. But, on the other hand, it is to be remembered that, however normal and universal it may be, the young love of the conventional, romantic type is at best a fleeting passion; that it is generally limited in its influence (if it proves to have any influence at all) to the two characters chiefly concerned; and that generally, when these have entered upon the real business of living, they tuck it away in a remote corner of memory seldom overhauled. Perhaps they will feel a faint stirring of the old emotion when the live wires of memory are again excited. The faded

flower is there, but the ineffable fragrance is forever gone. It is a rare soul that can revive the spirit of young love, when once it has slipped away. These are some of the reasons why the mature reader will not find the same fulness of joy in a commonplace love story as does the young person when he is most susceptible. And it is to be hoped that more and more magazines will so broaden the range of their themes that the sentimental love story will take something like its true rank in accordance with its actual value in determining human character and its actual place in the whole of human life. That it is at present vastly exaggerated, and at times greatly falsified, no one who reads many magazines can doubt. Some young people can and do love deeply and nobly; but the mass of evidence gathered from magazine fiction declares a passion cheap, common, shallow, appetitive, weakly sentimental, or ephemeral. Until this phase of adolescent passion is relegated to its proper place in the category of human emotions, the deeper and saner emotions of mature love, affection, and kindliness that prompt to lives of duty, of benevolence and charity, of purity and constancy, of heroism, possibly of tragic sacrifice, cannot be set upon their proper pinnacle. And, until they are so placed, the love story is in danger of remaining under the ban for many a serious-minded reader.

Is the love element essential to the success of the short-story? Brander Matthews says, "Of course he (the short-story writer) may tell a tale of love if he chooses, and if love enters naturally into his tale and to its enriching; but he ***need not bother with love at all unless he please.***[1] Some of the best of short-stories are love stories too ('Marjorie Daw'); but more of them are not love stories at all. If we were to pick out the ten best short-stories, I think we should find that fewer than half of them made any mention of the love of man for woman (the chief topic of the novel). . . . The short-story, being brief, does not need the love element to hold its parts together." The statement is the more striking in view of the fact that possibly nine-tenths of our fiction has early love for its main theme. But it is very true that, while we have so many readable short-stories of love, those which may be called great are very few.

In view of the facts that love is a normal — we might almost say a universal — passion; that, if genuine, it does influence the life of giver and receiver; that, if noble, it strengthens or beautifies the character, and, if ignoble, undermines integrity, — it would seem that there are possibilities in this theme which are not yet fully realized in this shorter form of fiction.

[1] Italics mine.

It may be maintained that the short-story does not need the love element to give it unity of plot and tone, as does the novel. But the love element has real value for the short-story in its transfiguring of character. The full course of love cannot well be compassed by the short-story: but many a phase of love can be successfully isolated. A character in love is in the process of becoming; and the determination of character is perennially interesting. It is in the heightening of the forces that go to character formation that love offers a promising field to the story-writer. A good love story, too, gives us a "vital feeling of delight" because it has in it joy and strength. There is nothing in the form or the scope of the short-story which should tend against the successful treatment of this theme. On the contrary, its brevity and compression contribute to the beneficent emotional effect of these tonic doses of delight. And yet the fact remains that love is the most used and worst abused of all the emotional elements of short-story literature.

Not only the critics, but some writers of fiction, believe that the passion of young love is a subject best omitted. The Italian novelist, Manzoni, when asked why he had cut out all the love scenes from his novels, answered: —

"Because I am of the opinion that one must not

speak of love in a way to lead others to that passion. . . . I believe that love is necessary in this world, but also that there will always be a sufficient amount of it; we need not therefore take the pains of cultivating it in others, for in cultivating it one helps only to arouse it where it is not wanted. There are other sentiments which the world is in more need of and that a writer may, according to his ability, spread somewhat more in the hearts of men, such as pity, love of mankind, a kindly disposition, mercifulness, and self-denial. These sentiments cannot be too numerous, and all praise to the writers who attempt to increase their strength among men. But what we call love, I think that I figure very moderately when I say that there is six hundred times more of it than is necessary for the preservation of our honorable species. . . . I am so convinced of this that if by a miracle, some day, I should be inspired with the most eloquent love-pages that man has ever written, I should not even take pen to jot them on paper, so certain am I that I should regret it." This is the view of an extremist, but it has a sound kernel of meaning. The physical aspect of love is not valuable for fiction unless it is employed in the interests of a higher purpose (as, for example, in picturing a moral tragedy, to show the results on character). And we do need to emphasize not only

other phases of the sentiment, but other sentiments than love.

The realistic tendency in modern fiction is largely responsible for the treatment of the irregular and unlawful passion of love, its conflict with the moral or social laws. Such love has the strength of untrained force. It may carry with it jealousy and infidelity, anger, sorrow, or despair; and it generally does involve catastrophe of some sort. As mature love and morbid love are at the same time greater and more perilous than conventional young love in real life, so they must be handled with much more care in fiction. The irregularity of love must not be mere eroticism, nor should it be so presented as to glorify lawlessness and revolt and to set up the morbid and abnormal above the natural and healthy. Within the limits of good taste and purity of purpose, the theme offers legitimate material for working out the strong tragic possibilities of a character. The point to be remembered is, that these emotions have no existence of their own and that they can be experienced and expressed only through their relation to character and conduct.

Some practical suggestions may be of value to the beginner who handles the love theme.

1. Do not believe that the introduction of the love

element does away with the necessity of logical and plausible plot construction. Love will have its own way, of course, but it should not be made to scale mountains of improbability. Although marrying the hero and the heroine is a comfortable way of making a final (?) disposal of them, there really ought to be some valid reason for their marrying. In a little article on "Why they Marry" in a recent number of *Munsey's*, the following reasons are enumerated: —

"The hero, in pursuit of an eloping brother, meets the heroine, in pursuit of an eloping sister; they promptly abandon the pursuit and elope themselves.[1] . . . Again, the hero is the one man whom the heroine will not marry; but they are off on a tally-ho together and he shows that he can handle the reins at a critical moment; so she marries him as a matter of course. Yet another hero insists upon wedding the girl who tries to defeat the passage of his bill in the Legislature; another, the damsel who seems to have cheated him out of a street-car fare. They marry to beguile the tedium of a transcontinental railway trip; they marry to provide themselves with pleasant companionship for a European tour; they marry to atone for rudeness and to pay bets; they marry for adventure, and they marry

[1] Probably a reference to Chambers's "A Young Man in a Hurry," *Harper's*, August, 1903.

for fun." The desire to bring the course of love to the old-time goal of matrimony, regardless of obstructions, causes many a writer to sin against all the laws of probability. If they must be driven to the altar, fictitious characters should be made to marry plausibly.

2. Since the theme of love is common, the love story needs something unique (this does not mean sensational or eccentric) in the situation, or something fresh in characterization, or in the quality of affection. Rob's proposal to Julia in Hamlin Garland's "Among the Corn-Rows" is simple enough, but the situation is unique.

3. The declaration of love is not necessarily the real crisis in its course. The earlier period of the dawning of love and the later one of the adjusting of the claims of love to the other claims of life are quite as important and, in most cases, considerably more interesting to outsiders. The choice of either of these periods will furnish a means of escape from the conventional proposal scene — generally the weakest instead of the strongest point of a love story.

4. If it becomes necessary to picture a love scene, rely largely on suggestion. Do not elaborate the love-making. Give only samples of the conversation, and a modicum of endearment. In short, do not drag an alcove scene into the broad glare of the footlights.

Be reserved. Avoid lushness of sentimentality. Let the sentiment be strong and genuine, but never over-ripe.

5. Begin far along in the story.

6. Do not carry the story too far. That conclusion of a love story is most effective where most is left to the imagination.

7. Do not balk at first sight of an emotional climax. If you have undertaken to write on the theme of love, do not shirk the real task, as was done by a student in this passage: —

"To fill in the many awkward pauses, they surveyed some large globes filled with wax flowers. At last he told her that they had been keeping company with one another for a long time, and that he wished her to be his wife."

8. Having struck an emotional key, do not tone down at the close.

And if the way seems hedged about with these restrictions, choose another motive for the predominating one. For, if this highest and finest of emotions cannot be presented worthily, it were better left untouched.

II. *Pathos and Tragedy*

The quality of pathos in literature may be very simply defined as that which arouses a pleasurable

activity of sympathetic pity. And pity has been defined by Addison as "love softened by a degree of sorrow." As such, pity is almost a universal emotion, though very different in its manifestations. The psychologist James Sully calls it "a wave of tender emotion which is in certain persons excited by the perception (or imagination) of another's distress." He goes on to say that pity must be allowed to be one of the greatest sources of human delight.[1] The seeming paradox, that the sight of another's distress should cause delight, is not hard to explain. The "delight" is caused not at all by the thought of another's suffering, but by the reader's generous response of sympathetic feeling, a response which would in real life normally go over into benevolent action. Pathetic stories with their "sad twilight pleasure" of sympathetic sorrow are thus to be classed among the greatest sources of humanitarian impulses, binding men together by a sense of universal brotherhood. Real pathos levels all distinctions and establishes a genuine democracy of feeling.

Moreover, sorrow and distress are intimately connected with development of character. It is not as isolated emotions that they furnish valuable literary material, but in their relation to the heroic virtues

[1] "The Luxury of Pity," *Forum*, v. 8.

of courage, devotion, and endurance. There are certain admirable traits of character which cannot be acquired save through suffering, and which cannot be presented in a literary form without the accompaniment of such circumstances as shall arouse in the reader the tender impulse of pity not unmixed with pain.

There are many varieties and degrees of pathos. The emotion aroused may be so sweetly sad as to be almost entirely pleasurable; and, again, a story of failure, of repression, of denial, may fill the heart with dull, uneasing pain. There is the pathos which degenerates into a sniffle, and there is that which lies "too deep for tears." There is the delicate pathos which wavers tremulously into humor every now and then (as in Steele and the Scotch humorists); and there is that which, pushed too far, falls over the verge into the domain of the ludicrous. And there is the poignant, bitter pathos which is so akin to tragedy that it necessarily accompanies it and cannot be distinguished from it.

The success of a pathetic story is dependent, first of all, of course, on the choice of a truly pathetic character or incident. The student who attempted to write a touching story which was based on a news paragraph relating the drowning of an infant in a twelve-gallon jar of buttermilk was lacking in a

keen sense of the ludicrous. Thoroughly tragic to those intimately concerned, the incident has its pathos marred for readers by the element of the grotesque. It is to be remembered that simple material is always more adaptable for pathetic effects than the eccentric or sensational.

A beginner often undertakes to handle a situation which he has actually observed, but which is dramatically beyond his powers of effectual reproduction. He vaguely feels the strength of his material and trusts to it to prove itself. Such inadequacy of treatment can best be shown by an example from a student's theme. The bald outline of the action is this: At a Christmas party in London, a young man said in jest that he would place his ring on the hand of his future wife. He chose a splendid young woman whom he knew slightly. The incident passed off in laughter. Several years later, the man, a prosperous merchant in India, became domestically inclined. He chanced to remember the incident, and decided to write to the girl and ask her to be his wife. Letters went back and forth; and finally the girl set out to meet him at Bombay. Here the writer seems to have had a momentary revelation of the dramatic (almost melodramatic) significance of the meeting on shipboard. For the girl, seized with a complete physical revulsion at the sight of the man

grown coarse and stout, and, realizing instantly that she could not be happy with him, "threw herself at his feet, before that great crowd, and implored him to let her go home. He was very much hurt, but he begged her to remain in India and get acquainted with him. 'For,' said he, 'I am considerably better than I look.' She consented finally, and when he had shown her the beautiful home which he had prepared for her, she was somewhat reconciled to her fate, and married him.

"Although he loved her and was always very kind, she was never happy. Of the three children that they had, only one was normal. The oldest was an idiot, and the other was a cripple. A short time after the birth of the youngest child, the mother went insane and, after a few years, died."

The author, in troubled apology, appends the note: "I am afraid this is unpleasant, but it actually happened. I knew the people well." The word *unpleasant* describes the result with a fair degree of accuracy. Somewhere in that concluding paragraph, with its implied preconditions, there lies buried a pathetically tragic story which the author has been unable to render in its true emotional significance. Falling short of that, he has given a series of unpleasant facts. One must live through such a story keenly before he can do it justice.

Even a truly pathetic situation will not have moving force unless the writer himself experiences the appropriate emotions. There is no chance of arousing a strong sentiment of pity by any such unfeeling account as this: —

"Friends began to notice that Mrs. Case's mind was becoming deranged. They watched her, and discovered in time to save her life several attempts at suicide. After passing about six weeks in this manner, she succeeded in killing herself, and her body was found frozen on her son's grave."

If there were any doubt that the bald narration of pathetic incidents is insufficient to arouse a sense of genuine pity, the newspaper, purveyor of daily tragedy and pathos, would be sufficient to overcome that doubt. If even a tenth of the sorrows of that list were made convincingly distressing and brought home to the reader, the newspaper would be drenched with tears, and the reader of many papers would go into hysteria. Fortunately, the harrowing accounts, not only through monotonous repetition, but through their very baldness and bareness of detail, are shorn of their emotional power. But a sensitive writer still may find in the daily press abundant sources of material fit for pathetic or tragic treatment.

Great care must be taken in the elaboration of

pathos or tragedy. Good taste cannot be taught outright, but it does seem that writers should learn to distinguish readily between the horrible and the pathetic, the ugly and the tragic. A news incident elaborated by a student into a "pathetic tragedy" will serve for an example. The material is this: "A wounded soldier with both legs amputated and some ribs broken, is tenderly and devotedly cared for by a Red Cross nurse. He loves her, and she watches by him for eight months, — until he dies." Here is an intensely pathetic situation, slightly softened by the tenderness of the nurse and by the patient's grateful love for her. But notice what a change comes over it when a youth's fancy exaggerates the love element, and falsifies the pathos. The soldier is made to experience a deceptive feeling of returning strength; he hopes to go back to his work, and he proposes marriage to his nurse. But she replies, "I could under no circumstances marry an invalid, and you will always be confined to your bed." "Then," the story concludes, "he gave one wild cry of horror and fainted away. When he came to, he was so weak that he could not stand the shock, and was a corpse within an hour." In such a treatment of this situation there is something of cold brutality and a good deal of melodrama. The amateur in story-writing very often works as

from outside, viewing his creatures coldly, standing aloof from their joys and sorrows. Possibly the greatest lack in the average short-story writer is that of pure, strong, reasonable, sustained emotion. And nowhere does the lack appear more crudely than in the story of pathos or tragedy. Sympathy cannot be imitated. A working up of the pitiful results in sentimentalism; and a working up of the tragic through the mere accumulation of harrowing details results too frequently in melodrama. The author must himself live through the emotion, suffering vicariously for his creatures, before he can reproduce their heart life in anything like a real way.

Differences in the method of presenting pathetic situations will account in some measure for the way in which the reader is affected. We are all familiar with the practice of Dickens in his skilful but conscious accumulation of such pathetic details as will move to tears. The death of Paul Dombey, and that of Little Nell are excellent examples of this kind of art. That it is art, we cannot doubt; whether it is the finest art of pathos is another question. Often a slight detail may be made (with apparently unconscious suggestion) more significant than a whole catalogue of details. Daudet, in "The Death of the Dauphin," [1] exhibits in a boy's grief a repression

[1] Translated in Nettleton's "Specimens of the Short-Story."

almost manly in its reserve. Brief, simple, yet powerfully suggestive is this sketch of the little king who must meet Death the leveller. No allowance will be made for little kings in that country; he must pass at his own worth. But the gay French courtiers have never prepared the lad for death; and his ignorance of the situation intensifies the pathos. And, when an inkling of the truth is brought home to him, he merely turns his face to the wall to weep — a simple movement, but more expressive than many words would be.

It must be remembered, in writing pathetic stories, that great griefs are never garrulous. Mrs. Browning has given full expression to this principle of reserved emotional force in the lines: —

> "I tell you hopeless grief is passionless;
> That only men incredulous of despair,
> Half taught in anguish, through the midnight air
> Beat upward to God's throne, in loud access
> Of shrieking and reproach. Full desertness
> In souls, as countries, lieth silent, bare,
> Under the blenching, vertical eye-glare
> Of the absolute heavens!"

The crude conditions of simple life, such as that of the western pioneers, offer opportunity for the presentation of situations which are rugged to the point of ugliness, but nevertheless very pitiful and very

human. Blunt and rough as are some of Bret Harte's stories in details of workmanship, in the broad emotions of humor and of pathos they excel. For example, in "The Outcasts of Poker Flat," Harte has worked out of his rough, coarse material at least one situation of the purest pathos. In the four pages of concentrated tragedy, in which four persons meet their death, there is one account which is elaborated just a little in its pathos — the picture of Piney and the Duchess; but there are two which are compressed to the very limit of dramatic suggestiveness — the death of the gambler, Oakhurst, and that of Mother Shipton. "Tennessee's Partner" has strong feeling in reserve, and "Prosper's Old Mother"[1] also excels in pathos. Hamlin Garland, another writer of uneven excellence, succeeds in drawing vivid pictures of rather hopelessly pathetic situations ("Main Travelled Roads"). Not so rugged, but no less genuine, is the pathos of Cable's "Old Creole Days," idyls of the creole life in Louisiana. Quieter and more reserved are the pathetic sketches of soul-starvation and repression by Mary Wilkins Freeman, characteristic of the life of the New England poor. In the stories of all these writers, as in Daudet's, pathos gains force through a wise parsimony and suggestive use of details. Reserve, repression, delicacy of feeling

[1] *Harper's*, April, 1902.

are essential to the finest pathos. Tragedy may be blunt, open, coarse, revolting; but pathos is a finer thing. A single touch may make or mar the pathos of a character. Shakespeare has made Shylock a comic figure, rather than a tragic or pathetic one, by a few incidental details which dull the keen edge of our sympathy with him, save when he rises to such a pitch of eloquence that obstructions are overborne and the abused Jew becomes for one spendid moment a great tragic figure.

Denial, lack, repression, sacrifice call for pity. When Marsh Rosemary[1] gives up her Jerry to that other woman, she reaches the height of the pathetic. Emmy[2] becomes heroic by a similar sacrifice — the dull monotony of self-repression rising at last into a height of dignity. The reader is glad that he can feel and appreciate the lack, the need, the sacrifice, the denial, the disappointment, the grief, the heart hunger of the character, whether the others in the story do or not. A sense of all this bitterness combined intensifies the pathos of "A Village Lear" till it becomes almost unbearable.

Possibly because the emotion of pity is akin to that of maternal love, the griefs of little children can be made to seem most pitiful. The sense of their helplessness contributes to the pathos of their troubles,

[1] *Atlantic*, 57 : 590. [2] *Century*, 19 : 499.

Kipling's "Baa-Baa Black Sheep" owes its moving qualities very largely to the reader's lively appreciation of the character of Punch and his feeling that the child is not properly appreciated by his aunt. Punch is a very live, human little boy, by no means foreordained to eternal damnation; he is simply misunderstood. The reader knows this at once. The repression or mistreatment of a sensitive child may be counted on as appealing to every one but a hardened villain. Hence the remarkable success of the tender little April sketches of childish joy and tears which are now so numerous.

When the pathos of a child's life culminates in tragedy, the story hurts. "Silly,"[1] by Maarten Maartens, is such a story. The tragedy is sufficiently artistic, but it is something of an infliction. The theme is the blind, unreasoning obedience of a simple-minded boy who is taught shrimp-catching by a philanthropic young countess, and is told by her always to obey his mother and his brother. One day the brother orders Silly to wade out farther into the water and to stay out until his return. But the brother forgets to return. And Silly wades farther and farther out, singing a foolish rhyme taught him by a stranger, "Shrimp, shrimp — all I need! . . ." "And a great wave from God arose

[1] *Success*, Sept. 2, 1899.

on the breast of the waters and swept over them, into stillness and peace." Yes, undoubtedly it was better that Silly should die (for his own sake, as well as that of art), but the tragedy is a hard one and only after some reflection softens into peace.

Somewhat similar in its emotional effect is a story by John Oxenham, entitled "Toine, Antoine, and Antoinette."[1] Here the poor little girl, with her incurable goitre and her passionate warmth of love for the man, after she has lost the one slight promise of joy in life, walks off quietly, blindly, over the edge of a bank and disappears from his sight into the lake before he can come to her. The child's misfortunes are cruelly heightened into tragedy.

The foregoing examples would seem to indicate that the boundary line between the pathetic and the tragic is so dim that it often ceases to exist. Of the great stories that rank as tragedies, most are tinged with pathos. Even grim, ironical tragedies of fate, such as Maupassant's "The Necklace" and Hawthorne's "The Ambitious Guest," have a kind of reflective pathos, an after feeling, on contemplation of the story motive. The pathos of "The Birthmark" and of "Rappaccini's Daughter" is as deeply interfused as the little hand itself, and as subtle as the atmosphere of the poison flower.

[1] *Everybody's*, March, 1904.

Tragedy and pathos merge insensibly in Virginia Boyle's "Black Silas."[1] Silas stands out a very big black negro against a background of flame, — a lurid picture of agony which finally resolves itself into simple, touching pathos. The overseer, Silas, disgraced by the murder of a sneaking rival, is left by his stern old master to choose his punishment. He elects to be branded with the mark of Cain and goes into a sort of voluntary exile. His "yellow gal" goes back on him. But faithful Silas saves his master's life and his home from fire, and, blind through his heroic efforts, receives freedom as his reward. The tragic effect is in the branding of Silas, rather than in his injury by fire. The height of the pathetic is reached in the desertion and the return of both the "yellow gal" and Silas's other friends in accordance with his disgrace or his honor with the master.

A large proportion of the great short-stories are pathetic or tragic in effect. The field is very wide and the shades of emotion capable of portrayal almost innumerable. The chances of success and of failure are correspondingly great. There is the danger of treating a pathetic situation coldly, of calmly picturing a tragedy; or, on the other hand, of becoming sentimental or melodramatic by an effort to pump up an emotion which does not present itself spontaneously.

[1] *Century*, January, 1900.

In tragedy, especially, care must be taken not to degenerate into melodrama. Tragedy must be convincing. The following is an instance of melodramatic tragedy: —

"But Gammon picked up courage enough to say,

"'Fannie, will you go with me and be mine?'

"'No, Eddie, papa is gone, mamma is not well, and we are poor. So I must stay. I will be yours if you will stay with me and mamma.'

"'I cannot stay with your mother. She is as mean as your father ever was.'

"'Oh, Eddie, how can you say so? Once I would have gone with you, but now —'

"*Boom! Boom!* came two shots from a revolver which Gammon had jerked from his pocket. Fannie fell lifeless and bleeding to the floor, and Gammon was out of sight in a moment."

Of all the faults in this crude attempt at the tragic, the most glaring is that the tragedy is not credibilized in any way.

The principle of reserve and dramatic suggestion is perhaps more important for tragic than for pathetic art. An excellent illustration of the principle is that cited by Brander Matthews in a foot-note to his "Philosophy of the Short-Story": —

"Around the very centre of motion, as in a whirlwind, there may be perfect quiet, a quiet which is

formidable in its very repose. In De Maupassant's terrific story of Corsican vengeance, 'Une Vendetta,' in which the sole actor is a lonely old woman who trains a fierce dog so that he ultimately kills her enemy, the author simply tells us, at the end, that this quiet fiend of destruction went peacefully home and went to sleep. '*Elle dormit bien, cette nuit-là.*' The cyclone has spent itself, and the silence left behind is more forcible than the cyclone itself."

Tragic themes are difficult to handle, but admirably adapted to the brevity and compression of the short-story. It is significant that most of the really great short-stories are either tragic or pathetic, and that the masters of the short-story have given their preference to tragic themes — this in spite of the fact that many critics have tried to bar the painful emotions out of literature. There are those tragedies which present "a sublime spectacle of the vindication of an outraged moral law, assent to which by us gives a certain solemn pleasure." There are the tragedies which aim to "purify the soul through pity or terror." There are tragedies of fate, which appeal to our sense of common human destiny. But there are still other tragedies unclassifiable, apparently without a special purpose. Have these reason for existence?

Horror and evil lend themselves readily to tragic treatment. How shall the author view them? We say at once that a story which presents horror and evil with any touch of cynicism or pessimism is a story with a bad aim. Yet we read many stories of this kind. We may say, perhaps, that crime and wickedness may be detached from the author's view of life — left to stand for themselves as artistic portrayals of real life, involving no interpretation by the author, predetermining the reader to no necessary attitude, but leaving him free to enjoy, to shudder at, to sicken with disgust, or to lose his feelings in a train of moralizing. Thus the author evades moral responsibility. The chance for making deep and vivid imaginative impressions will probably keep the stories of horror and of sin in favor with the greater writers and with many readers. But a story cannot receive universal or lasting appreciation if it leaves the bad taste of cynicism, pessimism, or despair. It is not high art to relax morally, to disgust with life, to dishearten, to render hopeless. This does not mean that art cannot portray the darker emotions: it means that they can and must be presented in a wholesome or at least unharmful way. Maupassant's "La Mère Sauvage," and "Une Vendetta," Balzac's "La Grande Bretêche," Kipling's "The Man Who Would be King" and "At the End

of the Passage," Poe's "The Black Cat," "The Tell-tale Heart," and "The Pit and the Pendulum," Hawthorne's "The Birthmark" and "Rappaccini's Daughter," and Stevenson's "Markheim" are essentially dark, ugly tragedies. But what strength of portrayal! Can we say such stories should be barred out of literature? They harrow the feelings, it is true; but none of them would be likely to dishearten one, or to relax the moral fibres.

Joy is not essential to the existence of the short-story. If it were, Poe, Kipling, Balzac, Maupassant, even Hawthorne, would be the worst instead of the best of story-tellers. Their finest stories are anything but joyful. The short-story, it must be remembered, aims at quick, strong impressions — what Howells rather contemptuously calls "effectism." It does not represent the author's whole view of life, as does the novel, but merely his appreciation of a special phase of life. The joyless phases are there, apparent to all. And their portrayal can be made very strong within the limits of the short-story. So we have these vivid, powerful sketches, quick as a summer shower and no more harmful. The world only looks the fresher and more wholesome after the lurid transfiguration of the lightning flash, and the sturdy things straighten up a little stiffer in the trail of the storm.

III. *Humor*

It is a sense of the eternal fitness of things that suggests a plea for humor in the short-story following a plea for a finer use of the pathetic and the tragic elements. For great tragedy and fine pathos are dependent for their perfection upon the saving grace of humor in their author. Without a keen sense of the ludicrous, tragedy degenerates into melodrama, and pathos into bathos. Nor can humor, on the other hand, live long without an admixture of the pathetic; for so delicately poised is our emotional nature that it wavers tremulously between mirth and sadness. The greatest humorists throughout the ages have been those large souls who have grasped this secret; who have comprised in their experience of life this complexity of emotional effects; who, with mild tolerance of the incongruous and unexpected combinations of events, have embraced all in a prevailingly sunny philosophy of life; mercurial temperaments these, flashing from gay to grave and sad. Theirs is never a broad glare of humor, but a cheery patch of sunlight where a stray beam has shot through the dense leafage of a forest.

To say that a humorist should have a sense of pathos and of tragedy and be acquainted with the deeper things of life is not equivalent to saying that

his work must be fraught with earnestness and serious purpose. It is fashionable nowadays to spy out an undercurrent of sense in even the most frivolous of humorists, if candor compels us to admit that we enjoy them. A very intelligent man declared that he valued Jerome Jerome's "Idle Thoughts" because, in spite of their apparent lightness, there is beneath a solid foundation of sober thought! Possibly a generation may arise some day who will have the courage and good taste to respond to the apparent lightness of such deliciously irresponsible essays in humor in spite of, rather than because of, the not so apparent solidity beneath. At present there is a sad lack of humor (that is, if we exclude from the class of humor all varieties of caustic wit). The magazines call in vain for humorous short-stories. There is no one to supply them. For even the young people, who might be expected to have leisure and inclination to see some fun in living, have their budding sense of humor blighted by a premature appreciation of the solemnity and strenuousness of life. College students write "appreciations" laboriously bringing out the melancholy fact that Falstaff was a liar and a rogue; they can prove it by the text, and they prove it to the bitter end. They say, too, that Lamb's essays are not to be taken seriously; for they are not only frivolous,

but too extravagant to be depended on (that roast-pig story, for example: expect a college student to take any stock in that?). Goldsmith, they admit, had some humorous insight into character; but then, everybody knows the "Vicar of Wakefield" is so illogical in plot that we cannot call it a novel. It is too long and loose for a short-story, too concrete for an essay, not serious enough for a sermon; so, they conclude, it is not much of anything at all. With commendable consistency and moral earnestness they have left Rabelais, Le Sage, Cervantes, and Boccaccio out of their libraries and their conversation. They will admit an expurgated Chaucer — as a language study book. Shakespeare's comedies they read, as a matter of course, but prefer his tragedies; and, if they incidentally bump up against a mountain of his mirth, proceed to lay it flat by explaining that such humor exists only in a riotous and immoral age, when men's thought and action are prompted by an extravagant intensity of feeling. The humor of eighteenth-century fiction must not, of course, be mentioned in polite society; for it, too, is an excrescence of one of those marvellous epochs in the emotional life of man which literary historians dub creative periods. It too, like almost everything genius has produced, occasionally errs in taste. And the most that modern criticism does

for the big rough humor of that age is to forgive it and forget it. For this particular variety of humor advancing civilization seems to have refined out of existence.

But there is Addison, the perfect humorist. There is nothing coarse or virile in Addison's humor, nothing broad, startlingly distorted, nastily suggestive, — almost nothing without a very legitimate and laudable moral purpose. We have here a civilized humor, all serene, ladylike, eminently respectable — and a humor we can analyze. Shall we then crown Addison the merry monarch? No one has harnessed up and trained the paces of a nicer humor, nor set a more respectable mission on the driver's seat. We shall long be drawn by it through many pleasant places; and it is safe to predict that it will never run away with us.

Steele's humor runs in double harness with his pathos; and now and then one unaccountably breaks loose and carries us away. We are brought back, however, by the zeal of the literary historian pointing out the fact that Steele's missionary endeavors were always thoroughly irregular, futile, and well-meaning. Perhaps, when the hearts of men grow young once more and the flawless Addison, together with the graver moralists, has had his day, poor foolish, tender-hearted, wayward, inconsistent

Dick, along with Chaucer, Lamb, and Goldsmith, will come into his own. For, after all, the essence of true humor is its broad humanity of spirit.

At present we are too busy and too earnest to give the gentle humorist his due. We have unfurled such a tremendous banner of "purpose" above our hosts of criticism that we have almost blotted out the sky. Scientists and utilitarians have so thoroughly analyzed our sunshine that we are disposed to piously thank God for its energizing qualities and its effect upon the crops, and utterly forget that it was meant for joy. Now, if a writer really must be assured that he has a mission before he sets to work at presenting a genuinely mirthful view of life, let him adopt the aim of banishing grief, despair, and pessimism from some hearts; of restoring a wholesome balance between the darker and the brighter moods which normally contribute to our make-up; of destroying the deadly microbe of earnestness which is fairly eating out our hearts, making us morbid, partially insane, and thoroughly uncharitable at times through our failure to realize that there is, after all, if we understand our fellow-man aright, a vast deal of fun in living. The humorist will always be misunderstood and underestimated by a certain class of people; but it should be enough for him to know that he has, notwithstanding, made a

positive contribution to the sum of human happiness. For humor does not merely raise a laugh; rather, it stirs all those sympathies and associations which go to make up universal human brotherhood. In its total effect upon our complex nature, humor is thus the most healthful and beneficent of all emotions, resulting normally in sanity of poise, in sweetness and charity of spirit, and in unswerving optimism.

Inasmuch as the humorous mood, like the tragic, cannot be sustained pure through a long period of time, it is excellently adapted to the scope of the short-story — so excellently adapted that it is surprising that the proportion of genuinely humorous short-stories since the time of Irving and Hawthorne is so small. But there may yet be found in the magazine literature of the day the story of humorous diction ("O. Henry" and Henry Wallace Phillips); the story of humorous plot or motive (J. Futrelle, "The Gray Ghost," *Everybody's*, August, 1903); the story of the humorously unconventional situation (Bunner, "Love-Letters of Smith"; White, "Life of the Winds of Heaven," *McClure's*, August, 1903); the farcically romantic situation (Loomis, "The Cannibals and Mr. Buffum," *Cosmopolitan*, January, 1906, Marsh, "The Girl on the Sands," *Strand*, October, 1904); the broad humor of adult

characterization (Harte, "Colonel Starbottle for the Plaintiff," *Harper's*, March, 1901); and the more delicate humor of child life (Myra Kelly and Josephine Dodge Daskam, *et al.*). While these stories, selected almost at random from a shelf of magazines, may not have the exact flavor of the classic humorists (I suppose there must be classic humorists), they are sufficient to indicate that in American authors the sense of humor is still making a struggle for existence. It is greatly to be desired that the humorous story-teller should be more generally considered as a public benefactor, and that a lively sense of humor should be considered a desirable trait of character in every man. Stevenson speaks somewhere of "such radical qualities as honor, and pathos, and humor," a combination which startles the conventional thinker with a sense of incongruity, so accustomed have we become to regarding a sense of the ludicrous as a rarity. It is desirable for all men, but almost indispensable to one who would make literature. Let the scientist, the philosopher, the moralist, despise it if they will; but let the literary man reach out after this great good. There really ought to be an examination of candidates for admission to this goodly company, on the trait of humor. It would be likely, as Barrie says, to "keep out mony a dreich body." It might, on the other

hand, serve as admission ticket for many a fresh young genius.

The subject of humor might be expounded very fully, if not very satisfactorily. One of the most discouraging signs of the time is the fact that so many people are writing *about* humor, — long, dull articles explaining what it is or isn't, and lining up examples without number to prove it so. The painstaking solemnity of such articles is slightly ludicrous to those who already have a sense of humor; and it is doubtful whether those who have it not will ever acquire it through such reading. The best of these articles (which may be easily searched out from Poole's) do constitute quite an excellent body of belief for those who desire to know the doctrine. But the person of truly humorous inclination will perhaps prefer Barrie's account of how Lang Tammas became a humorist, and will like to have his individual theory of what is humorous to him, and a full list of favorite illustrations from his readings. To him is recommended a list of readings *in* humor. The genuine humorist frankly disregards all rules. And the best one can do for a humorist is to permit him to be merry and let his mirth expand.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SPIRIT OF THE AUTHOR

THE story of mere incident or ingenious plot does not necessarily reveal the spirit of the author; but the story which interprets character and human life — the story which makes a distinct emotional appeal — inevitably suggests the personality of the author, no matter how objectively he works. Hawthorne considered himself a most objective writer. He says, in a mood of self-confession: —

"A cloudy veil stretches over the abyss of my nature. I have, however, no love of secrecy and darkness. I am glad to think that God sees through my heart, and if any angel has power to penetrate into it, he is welcome to know everything that is there. Yes, and so may any mortal who is capable of full sympathy, and therefore worthy to come into my depths. But he must find his own way there. I can neither guide nor enlighten him. It is this involuntary reserve, I suppose, that has given the objectivity to my writings; and when people think that I am pouring myself out in a tale or an essay,

I am merely telling what is common to human nature, not what is peculiar to myself. I sympathize with them, not they with me."

But has any author ever succeeded better in stamping upon the reader's mind the impression not only of his imaginative genius, but of his temperament and even his character? Take his pure, limpid children's stories. They illustrate the author's statement that he has no love of secrecy or darkness. And we can well imagine that the man who crowned such dark stories as "The Birthmark," "Rappaccini's Daughter," and "The Scarlet Letter" with such excellent symbolic meaning was truly glad that God saw through his heart. His religious belief and his trust in God and in his providence shine through the gloom of even his tragic stories. It is to be breathed in with their very atmosphere. And, lighting up the sombre themes which his imagination loved to dwell upon, his genial humor plays over all, attracting young and old alike. One cannot read Hawthorne long without becoming subtly aware of this intimacy of approach, as if he were being drawn into a friendly circle maintained about the personality of Hawthorne. Similarly, Irving's good-natured humanity stamps its impression of the author's temperament upon our moods. And, after an hour with Poe, we need hardly go to biography

to understand that he had "mental disease raised to the *n*th power" coupled with the most daring and original genius. We could even guess out some of the melancholy facts of the author's life.

The spirit of the author is not to be judged by his choice of material, but rather by his choice of motive, his manner of treatment, and his total attitude toward his story. Says Winchester:[1] —

"Every kind of unrighteousness may be depicted, and yet the work be moral. But when literature becomes blind to nature and the results of sin, it is false to ultimate facts and so offends not only against morality, but against art. A book is not immoral because it is full of pictures of sin, nor moral because it is crammed with saints. 'Richard III' is moral, though its hero is almost a devil; while some very immoral novels may still be found in Sunday-school libraries. . . . Life must be shown truly, if wholly, so that artistic admiration and moral condemnation of a splendidly evil character go hand in hand."

Inasmuch as sin and evil and moral crises in the life of man offer such opportunities for powerful literary effects on account of their universality of appeal, the morality of tone of a story must be considered an integral part of its impression. The

[1] "Principles of Literary Criticism," p. 111 and p. 115.

short-story has no call to preach. It does not need to teach a moral truth. But it must never be immoral; and it rarely is quite unmoral, if it is a story worth remembering. The term *morality* has been given here a special breadth of meaning, as in Howells's "Criticism and Fiction" (p. 83): —

"Morality penetrates all things, it is the soul of all things. Beauty may clothe it on, whether it is false morality and an evil soul, or whether it is true and a good soul. In the one case the beauty will corrupt, and in the other it will edify, and in either case it will infallibly and inevitably have an ethical effect, now light, now grave, according as the thing is light or grave."

The moral tone of a story appears best in the author's handling of the emotional elements. It centres about moral crises, the course of love, and humorous, pathetic, and tragic incidents.

In the handling of the love element, the greatest sin against morality has been, not the incidental coarseness of the mediæval tale or of the eighteenth-century fiction, — for that is disgusting and therefore not so dangerous, — but rather a clever sentimentalism, a more refined and hence more subtle eroticism, combined with the assumption of the total and inevitable supremacy of desire over conscience. Not only in French fiction, but in English as well,

there is a distinct department devoted to this naturalistic treatment of the passion of love in its irregular developments. It owes its success to a stimulation of the senses, to a rousing of powerful though degrading emotions which act as a drug on conscience, and to the fascination which an account of wickedness seems to have for the imagination of even the most godly. The American novel, for the most part, and the American short-story altogether shun this prostitution of the muse of literature, devoting themselves to the picturing of pure love and normal, honest passion, to the exclusion of guilty intrigues, betrayals, and even the flirtations of the lowest grade. The tone of the mass of American magazine fiction is good and clean.

The author, by his attitude toward a character at a crisis, can very delicately determine the reader's conception of the conduct represented. For example, in reading "Baa-Baa Black Sheep," no one feels shocked when Punch threatens to stab the black-haired villain, Harry, with the table knife. We have been prepared for this. We feel no hostile stirrings of ethical condemnation when Punch commits suicide by licking off the paint from his Noah's Ark animals. The conditions are made to justify extreme measures such as these. Again, in "A Note of Scarlet," the reader is drawn into such genial sympathy with the

woman that, however conventional and proper he himself may be, he experiences a feeling of relief when she breaks all precedent and knits a mat of "a all-fired red." And he is gradually led on into sympathy with her degeneration so that he almost forgets to be shocked when she "cuts" church, and wanders off to the river, where she contemplates a solitary fish-fry on the holy Sabbath. We have not all broken loose in just this way; but we have all been cramped by habit and convention, and most of us have been tempted to cut loose just for once. In the same inexplicable way, Balzac in "La Grande Bretêche" wins the liveliest sympathy for Madame de Merret, though here our judgment distinctly tells us she is a wrongdoer.

Where comment is introduced, the author's attitude stands self-revealed. A single sentence suggests a philosophy of life. Garland's belief that environment to a very large extent determines character and action is to be guessed from the tone of the story, "A Branch Road," but it is expressed outright in this commentary:—

"He thought how bright and handsome Ed used to be, and he felt after all that it was no wonder she married him. *Life pushes us into such things.*"

The volume of "Main Travelled Roads" has a distinct unity of emotional coloring suggestive of the

author's whole view of life, a sense of the predominance of hardship and evil crossed here and there by an inexplicable spirit of hopefulness. The author's temper and point of view are admirably set forth in the introductory remarks before the title-page: —

"The main-travelled road in the West (as everywhere) is hot and dusty in summer, and desolate and drear with mud in fall and spring, and in winter the winds sweep the snow across it; but it does sometimes cross a rich meadow where the songs of the larks and bobolinks and blackbirds are tangled. Follow it far enough, it may lead past a bend in the river where the water laughs eternally over its shallows.

"Mainly it is long and wearyful and has a dull little town at one end, and a home of toil at the other. Like the main-travelled road of life, it is traversed by many classes of people, but the poor and the weary predominate."

This is a sad view, but not altogether cynical and bitter. Pushed further, it might become fatalism, pessimism, cynicism. One cannot read Hardy's volume, "Life's Little Ironies," without feeling now and then a distinct antagonism to the author's view of life. To select a single example, "On the Western Circuit," an intrigue plot involving the betrayal of a simple-minded girl, the entrapping of her betrayer into marriage, and the boomerang effects upon the

woman who helped prepare the trap, there are frequent unpleasant glimpses of the author's attitude toward the situation. The story is really an ethical situation, but it is presented calmly, ironically, as if Nature were simply having her own way in playing grim little jokes upon the characters. The man is "curvilinear and sensuous"; the heroine, a fair product of nature, whose pinkness and freshness "made a deeper impression on his sentiments" every time he looked upon her. The country girl's mistress views the development of the intrigue in a peculiarly detached way. The man proceeds to win the girl, purely as a matter of circumstance. "Much he deplored trifling with her feelings for the sake of a passing desire; and he could only hope that she might not live to suffer on his account." The guilt is laid on neither person. Anna is altogether too ignorant to deserve half the blame. And the man is gently excused by some such comment as this: "Awkward as such *unintentional connections* were. . . ." By a similar series of unintentional downward steps, Anna's mistress drifts away from love of her own husband and, for no more apparent reason than that Anna's betrayer has once held her hand in mistake for Anna's, falls passionately in love with him on her own account. Naturally, the outcome of such a tangle is nothing pleasant or

encouraging. We cannot accuse Hardy of making this picture of sin alluring; but what shall we say of three characters (and, apparently, the author back of them) viewing an ethical situation without the slightest connection, one way or the other, with the standards of morality? Moreover, there is nothing splendid in the picture; all is sordid and low. Such detachment from moral standards is artificial and abnormal; and, if it is our habitual point of view, it is neither wise nor kind to seek to spread it. If one does not wish to become a literary malefactor, let him first make sure of the purity of his purpose, and then, before making his work public, carefully consider whether his work is within the limits of good taste; for "taste is always on the side of the angels."

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READING LIST

THE classification made here is arbitrary and not final. It serves only to illustrate points developed in the text and to suggest other points for study. Some of the stories therefore recur in new groupings.

I. THE MOTIVE

HAWTHORNE. The Birthmark. Rappaccini's Daughter. Lady Eleanore's Mantle. The Great Stone Face. The Prophetic Pictures. The Ambitious Guest.

MAUPASSANT. The Necklace. The Piece of String. A Coward ("The Odd Number," *Harper's*).

GARLAND. Up the Coulée ("Main Travelled Roads").

KIPLING. Baa-Baa Black Sheep.

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II. THE PLOT

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STEVENSON. Markheim.

5. Dramatic Subdivision

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III. UNITY OF TONE. IMPRESSIONISM

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X. HUMOR

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XI. THE AUTHOR'S ATTITUDE

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COPPÉE. The Sabots of Little Wolff.

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SUGGESTIONS FOR ASSIGNMENTS OF STORIES AND CONSTRUCTIVE EXERCISES

A COURSE in short-story writing presupposes elementary practice in narration. It may be profitable, however, at the start, to overlap such work by a few assignments in the simpler forms of narrative. The themes and exercises listed below are not recommended for wholesale adoption in any classroom, but are presented in the hope that some of them may prove useful hints.

It will be noted that the use of a reading list of stories roughly classified, so that they may be profitably discussed in the classroom, will furnish a valuable preparation for original constructive work in special forms of the short-story where a definite effect is aimed at. The good and the bad points of the students' work may also be discussed in class so far as they are of general interest, and more fully in private consultation. Painstaking reconstruction and rewriting of promising material after criticism will be found the most helpful part of a course in story-writing. The extemporaneous exercises (ten to fifteen minutes) may be at first distasteful, but will soon grow interesting. Their best service is in ridding the student of the idea that he cannot write at all unless inspired.

SIMPLE NARRATIVE

1. A narrative of a day's experience; involving selection of incidents, proportion, and perspective.

2. A tale of adventure, with one main character: a series of interesting events with or without a special plot construction.

The action should progress constantly and increase in intensity toward an effective climax.

PLOT CONSTRUCTION

3. As a preliminary to plot construction, the student should analyze several stories whose plots are prominent (*e.g.* Poe's "The Gold-Bug"), and several written to display a motive, so that he will grasp plot and idea definitely enough to be able to express them.

4. A plot story constructed from a single incident found ready in another form (*e.g.* a news paragraph, an incident or episode from a novel or a narrative poem). The source should be handed in with the story for comparison. This will test the student's appreciation of the difference between the short-story and other narrative forms.

5. A plot outline constructed from a single incident in the student's own experience.

6. A plot outline developing a given situation. (For example, the newspapers, a few years ago, were full of accounts of the abandonment of little Jimmy Whistler on the steps of an artist's studio, and of his legal adoption by the three young men who found him. Follow out the consequences of some such situation.)

7. A plot story working from an imagined situation of the characters: more specifically, the development of a "problem-plot." (See Maupassant's "The Coward," "The Necklace," "A Piece of String"; Balzac's "A Passion in the Desert"; Garland's "Up the Coulée.")

8. A plot story developing a given idea or motive. Care must be taken to make the idea distinct but not too baldly prominent.

Some of Hawthorne's unused ideas ("American Note-Books") will furnish starting-points.

9. The same assignment may be repeated, the student in-

venting the motive or idea. It should be distinct enough in his mind to admit of definite phrasing.

10. A "surprise" story, with a reverse or unexpected ending. This is an exercise in handling plot probabilities.

11. A "detective" story; that is, a story presenting a mysterious situation and working backward to its solution. This is an exercise in ingenious plot-making.

12. A story whose plot is rigidly subordinated to the working out of a definite mood or imaginative impression. This is an exercise for securing unity of impression.

13. A reconstruction of one of the simple plot stories already written, crystallizing the incidents so that the story falls apart into a few striking scenes that may be vividly conceived and written out with little if any connecting narrative. This is designed to give practice in dramatic presentation of the main incidents and subordination of the minor.

MECHANISM

14. Study plot stories already written to see whether they can be improved by a new location in point of time. Most stories are written on too large a scale at the beginning, so that the ending, which is the story proper, must be contracted. Rewrite from a good central standpoint, from which the small beginnings will assume their true perspective. Note also the methods of passing gaps in time, and improve transitions wherever possible.

BEGINNING

15. Extemporaneous. Furnish a background in the least space possible, and carry the story just far enough to enlist the reader's interest.

16. Write a paragraph or two setting an appropriate background for working out an assigned effect (such as the mood and motive of Mary Wilkins Freeman's "The Solitary").

17. Given a complex situation, as, for example, a clash be-

tween character and environment, or any problem-plot, write a slow beginning indicating time, place, and all preliminary events which are necessary for a full understanding of the situation.

18. Extemporaneous. Write a beginning formally introducing the main character by description and explanation or narration.

19. Extemporaneous. Write a beginning introducing a character in the midst of the story, and rapidly suggesting the preconditions.

20. Write a conversational beginning which will not require the return of the action to its starting-point, but will be self-explanatory of the situation.

POINT OF VIEW. THE NARRATIVE FORM

21. Write a first person story involving some analysis of motive and interpreting of situation.

22. Write the same story in the third person, omitting all comment from the author.

23. Rewrite a story from the point of view of the second character rather than of the main one. Note how the story changes.

ENDING

24. Write out in full the *dénouement* and conclusion for a plot outlined by the instructor.

25. Extemporaneous. End a story which is read aloud up to the *dénouement* (*e.g.* Maupassant's "The Coward"). Try to follow out the plot probabilities and get the inevitable ending if there is one.

26. Extemporaneous. Repeat Exercise 25 for the sake of securing harmony of tone with the original.

Bunner's "Love Letters of Smith" ("Short Sixes") called forth some excellent variations on the original conclusion.

27. Write a story involving careful preparation for *dénouement*. See whether you can secure the effect of climax by a very gradual revelation of the way to a conclusion which is inevitable and easily foreseen.

28. Write a story with an ending which does not entirely solve the situation, but yet brings the narrative to an artistic close. The situation must be a strong one, such as the problem plot.

Note. In revising stories, it will be found that many will be improved by shortening the endings — not the *dénouement*, but the conclusion.

UNITY OF IMPRESSION

29. After a study of Poe, Hawthorne, Maupassant, and Kipling, Exercise 12 may be rewritten so that the unity of plot and singleness of purpose may be rendered effective by a more careful selection of details for impressionistic purposes and by harmonious setting. The emphasis is to be laid on harmony of tone throughout, and especially between the beginning and the ending.

TITLE

30. The class may frame (extemporaneously) appropriate titles for a short and simple story read aloud by the instructor. These may be discussed at once and compared with the original as to their degree of fitness. The effort to convert interesting news captions into genuine story titles, to supply magazine stories with other titles, and to find better ones for his old stories will help the student to realize the value of a title.

CHARACTER

31. Extemporaneous. A complete presentation of a real character; the external appearance by description, and the traits of mind and character by exposition.

32. Extemporaneous. Rewrite Exercise 31 with an eye for story points. Make the description suitable for incorporation in a story, and select the leading trait or traits for emphasis.

33. Extemporaneous. An impressionistic description of a face, so as to suggest the main features of the character or disposition.

34. Extemporaneous. A brief analytic sketch of an imaginary composite character.

35. Extemporaneous. Narration of a minor incident strikingly suggesting a trait of character through a single action.

36. Extemporaneous. A character presented under the influence of a strong emotion. Facial expression, intensity of dialogue, and action may all be made suggestive. See how much can be suggested without analysis (preparatory to Exercise 38).

37. A simple story of character involving a growing conception and realization of one main character.

38. The story of a crisis in the life of a single character, with a mere suggestion of future change or growth.

39. A story whose main character goes through a process of development. The process may be one of degeneration or regeneration; or it may portray the ripening or dissolution of any great mental or emotional forces without involving moral issues (*e.g.* Mary Wilkins Freeman's "The Revolt of 'Mother'").

40. The same story (39) may be presented by the dramatic method of scenes showing stages in the growth of the main characters. Here the plot must be rigidly subordinated to the presentation of the character; and the main incident must be expanded.

41. An impressionistic sketch of character emphasizing strongly a single trait or the total imaginative impression (*e.g.* Hawthorne's "The White Old Maid").

42. A character story involving the principle of contrast.

(*a*) Contrast between the apparent and the real nature of the character. (Kipling's "A Second-Rate Woman.")

(*b*) Conflicting elements within the man. A complex character consisting of a balance between opposing forces. (Garland's "Up the Coulée." See also Stevenson's "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.")

(*c*) A contrast between two or more characters of a story. (Stevenson's "A Lodging for the Night"; Harte's "Outcasts of Poker Flat.")

43. A story of child character. This requires sympathy and delicacy of treatment.

44. A story whose main character is the type of a class or a profession of men. (The motive or idea will be prominent.)

45. A symbolic sketch of character (Hawthorne's "The Great Stone Face"; Coppée's "The Sabots of Little Wolff"; Mary Wilkins Freeman's "The Twelfth Guest").

Note. The oral telling of original three-minute anecdotes illustrative of traits of character may tend to sharpen the student's observation.

Subordination of characters is an important part of the work of characterization. Refer, in this connection, to exercise 23.

DIALOGUE

46. Extemporaneous. Two characters from a story previously written converse on an assigned topic of current interest. This exercise is designed to compel a vivid realization of the characters' mental point of view.

47. Extemporaneous. Report an interesting conversation overheard. Then condense and edit it so that it might be incorporated in a story.

48. A dialogue story with the least possible connecting narrative and comment.

49. A story told through dialogue alone after the two main characters are introduced. Indication of the speaker should not be necessary.

50. A group of persons presented in conversation, with the effort to suggest as many characters as possible through dialogue in a single situation. (Chapters of "Mill on the Floss" will serve for illustration.)

51. A dramatic situation (an emotional crisis) quickly suggested by intense dialogue. This exercise will be useful in connection with assignment 38.

SETTING

52. A college story. (Try, first of all, to realize existing and familiar backgrounds.)

53. A story of historical setting may be attempted if the student is willing to collect the necessary information. The literature of the period of the Civil War, for instance, should make it comparatively easy to realize the circumstances vividly.

54. A story of local color, portraying the life in a section of the country with which the student is personally familiar. Dialect may be resorted to, if necessary.

55. A story whose setting harmonizes with the motive and the desired impression of the story. (Study the use of background by Hardy and Mary Wilkins Freeman.)

56. A story whose setting contrasts with the final impression or motive of the story. This assignment, like the preceding one, calls for a careful study of the relation between a character and his environment.

Note. After studying the function of the setting, old stories may need to be revised with reference to the occasional touches which elaborate the background.

REALISTIC SETTING

The simplest exercises in descriptions of rooms, of streets, of towns, etc., will be useful preliminaries. It will be found that all of these may be made suggestive of the character of the inhabitants.

57. A homely story of everyday life, with the object of realizing vividly the small details that are significant.

58. A realistic sketch of the life of a special class, profession, locality or time, or manners or customs: the aim to be accuracy of detail (a similar assignment to 54).

59. A sketch of the same general nature as the above but involving sympathetic interpretation; the narrative to have a distinct motive.

FANTASY

60. A story of mystery explained. (Kipling's "The Return of Imray's Ghost.")

61. A story of mystery unexplained; the weird, the supernatural, or the fantastic. (Poe, Hawthorne, Irving, Kipling, will furnish models.)

62. A fairy-tale, allegory, or fable.

63. A scientific romance.

THE EMOTIONAL ELEMENT

1. Love

64. A simple story of the dawning of love, under normal conditions, in one or two main characters. This may require a hint of development of character.

65. A story of love involving conflict, such as the adjustment of the claims of love to the other claims of life. More characters may be presented here, and the plot may be of the nature of a problem.

66. A story whose motive is the affection between man and

man, woman and woman, child and parent, or brother and sister. (This field has been less worked than that of the customary love motive.)

67. A brief love story, suggesting the situations almost entirely by means of conversation. See suggestions, Chapter XIII.

68. Extemporaneous. An unique proposal.

2. Pathos and Tragedy

69. Extemporaneous. Narrate a pathetic incident, sparing all but the necessary details.

70. Extemporaneous. Describe the death of your chief character. Take care not to be oversentimental or melodramatic.

71. A pathetic story of character. This requires of the author sympathetic interpretation of the character in relation to his environment. (Mary Wilkins Freeman's "A Village Lear.")

The sorrows of child life are peculiarly adapted to the scope of the short-story.

72. A tragedy of character. (This may be combined with exercises 38 to 42.)

73. A tragedy of incident. (A variation of the fate motive may be used. Note that the tragedy here is external: that of 72, internal.)

3. Humor

An instructor with a sense of humor will study his men carefully before prescribing any definite humorous effect for them to aim at. It is to be hoped that some humor will crop out when not solicited.

74. A story in the first person, humorously revealing the author's temperament or character through his reflective comments on his own experience.

75. A humorous sketch of adult character. (Harte's "Colonel Starbottle for the Plaintiff.")

76. A humorous story of child life. (Josephine Daskam's "Ardelia in Arcady.")

77. A story whose main incident presents a comical situation.

78. A farce or one-act comedy.

MISCELLANY

79. A diary short-story.

80. A short-story suggested by letters, telegrams, or telephone messages, or these in combination.

81. A story suitable for a special season or occasion.

82. A single situation presented, largely by description, so suggestively as to hint a story. The situation must be strong, dramatic. (The French writers excel in this practice of deftly cutting out the heart of a story situation.)

83. A one-act play. (See Howells's "Parlor Farces," *Harper's*.)

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